THE MAN IN THE BLUE SUIT
John Armstrong Walker

The Man in the Blue Suit
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Open rebuke is better than secret love. Proverbs 27:5

To people who love freedom

1

Life was good for the Man in the Blue Suit. He owned a small art salon in the city centre of Glasgow, and every day he enjoyed himself. You see, he lived in a world that very few people understand. One of the strange things about him was that he had forgotten what age he was; he had stopped counting up the years, many years ago. He did not celebrate his birthday anymore. In fact, he did not know his age, and he did not want to be reminded of it either, by friend or foe. Sometimes, he caught sight of his date of birth on a tax form, or official document, but he ignored it.

Life was something to celebrate, not numbers, or anniversary dates in diaries, or on calendars. Life was for the living, and living life for the Man in the Blue Suit was all about enjoying himself. The measuring rod of life to him was happiness.

He had lived upstairs now from his art gallery in Glasgow, for twelve years. His salon was situated right in the middle of the city centre in West Nile Street. Although, a lot of traffic went up and down this street, no buses passed by this way. At times, it did not feel like his salon was located in the heart of the city. However, when the odd fire engine or police siren wailed, as it passed by his salon, it reminded him where he was, and of course that something untoward had taken place somewhere. This extreme noise

sometimes reminded him of his past, and the strange things he had seen in life, but apart from that it was relatively quiet in this part of the city, where he worked and lived.

During the week, he always left his salon around 1pm, and went for a drink somewhere close by. He usually returned about 3pm. His favourite bar was called Ronnie's Cafe. Everyone in the city knew him there, due to his famous blue suit. Having said that, not many people knew what he did for a living, but then again very few people cared. It is safe to say that people in the modern world did not really pay much attention about what others did, or did not do for a living. It is also safe to say that in this year, 2012, people all over modern Europe no longer lived in local communities; they existed independently from one another. This was mainly due to government initiatives, and other strange forces at play. The general feeling in society nowadays was that freedom existed only when you were free of others. This was a strange thing; it was a strange world now. The family was under threat from every aspect of modern culture.

People were led to believe, via the media, that isolation was the only way to survive this terrible modern nightmare world. People in general thought that the authorities, and other agencies who watched over them, would leave you alone if you lived in isolation of others. Politicians were seen as oligarchs, or at worst corrupt. Their surgeries were empty, a sure sign that people had given up on them, and that they no longer represented their communities. The old world where people to survive had to belong to a community, or at least a group of people, had long gone. As long as you had access to a computer - to social media as it was called - you were part of the modern world: for that way you were connected to society. All over the world, educated people generally accepted this as a fact now.

The church was baffled by it all, very few ministers, or priests, spoke out against society, or the state. Some people said that freedom was only possible via electronics. You got benefits paid to you that way, food delivered to you that way - you could even find love that way.

The Man in the Blue Suit had no time for misanthropy. He was friendly and kind. He was a very funny man too; for he had a great sense of humour. He loved the company of just about everyone and anyone, even if they cared little for his business, his art, or even for him. He saw something interesting in them. He loved to chat, and he loved to look at people, and listen to them as they talked about themselves and others.

More often than not the Man in the Blue Suit visited his favourite cafe in the city centre of Glasgow, and every day he drank tea there, and therefore he called it a tearoom. At night, he drank wine there and of course thought of it as a bar. No one knew what to make of him. He was always smartly dressed in his single breasted blue suit, white shirt, and casual leather moccasins.

Every day, he chatted to the barmaids, and the ladies at the bar, and when he got the opportunity he took the single woman back to his art salon and made love to them. When they left him the only thing they knew about him was that he was a great lover, and that he sold paintings for a living When a woman left him, he always told her: "You are beautiful," and he would kiss her on the cheek and say, "Until we meet again."

Very few women who had been with the Man in the Blue Suit ever forgot that kiss. He understood women, and their needs. He was great fun to be with. He had style, and animal sexuality; the latter he could not hide inside, or outside his chic blue suit.

No matter where he was, be it in his favourite bar, or in his salon, he loved to sing Italian pop songs to himself. He did this when he was sober, and when he was tipsy. When he sang people, of course who did not know him, would stare at him and some of them would laugh at him. It is true to say the Man in the Blue Suit left an impression on everyone who set eyes on him.

He loved the Riviera, so much so that as soon as he woke up he played Italian songs to remind him of his exploits there. He had learnt all the lyrics. His favourite song was: *La stagione dell'amore*. He often stayed in Italy there on the French Italian border. As soon as he heard the songs again, he was transported back to the cities and resorts he had visited, and when it rained, as it often did in his na-

tive city, he would imagine himself once again in the south of France having a coffee in some cafe bar there, or walking along the promenade.

Every morning, a woman with a slim figure of about forty years of age came to his office in Glasgow to clean his salon for him. He had put an advert in the window about two years ago when 'Old Annie' had retired. He called this woman, who now cleaned his salon, the Two Tattooed Woman. This was after she had come in one morning with two small tattoos on her body: a strawberry on her shoulder, and a love heart on her ankle. He thought her very funny indeed: for although she thought herself cultured, she was as common as muck, as they say in Glasgow. She was friendly, but her best friend could not say she was refined or cultured.

The Man in the Blue Suit when out socialising had only one fear; he dreaded meeting vulgar woman, and now one in particular: the Two Tattooed Woman. He knew many vulgar women frequented the bars and restaurants of Glasgow. Not long after she had started working for him, he came to the conclusion that she was his nemeses.

It was true to say that before ordering anything in a bar now, or restaurant, he would look around him just in case she was in. For he knew that if she spotted him she would fly across the room, and in front of everyone in the bar she would try and kiss him and hug him the way people do on TV and in films. Then she would launch into the most unbelievable vulgar language. You see since she had started cleaning his salon, she believed she had become part of the art establishment. She thought she could carry on that way when she was in his company. Many vulgar women did this kind of thing, no doubt influenced by celebrities, and others they had read about in magazines and on Internet sites, but it must be said no one carried it off as well as the Two Tattooed Woman.

The Man in the Blue Suit liked a Tuesday better than a Monday; for the city was more active and alive then. He sometimes shut early on the first working day of the week. He knew that when there were more people in the city his business naturally

became more active. People would at times pop into his salon, and look at his paintings, and now and again a client would buy one.

It was a strange thing, but just last Tuesday a nice Italian man had visited his salon and sold him a painting. The painting he sold him had a very interesting title. It was called *Time Shadow*. The Man in the Blue Suit bought it from him, and hung it up behind where he sat in his salon. If truth be told, he really didn't' know what to do with it now.

The other strange thing that had happened was that the day after he had bought the painting from the nice Italian man, he had received a letter from a woman he had met on a train many years ago. She was called Twiggy. She wrote and told him that on no account had he to sell the painting, *Time Shadow*, to anyone: "Only sell it to Olga,' was her instruction: 'You have to meet her next week at Nice, south of France. She will approach you there. Please find enclosed a cheque for your expenses."

It was all very queer. What did Twiggy mean? 'Only sell it to Olga.'

Sitting here today in his art gallery, looking out of the window, he wondered what he should do. Should he go to the south of France and sell it to Olga, or should he take it down and hang it up in his apartment and forget about all that he had read? It was only last week the nice Italian man had called in to see him, and asked him if he would like to buy the painting. The image of him was still in his mind. On reflection, he seemed very keen to sell it to him. He was a friendly man

The Man in the Blue Suit had to admit to himself that the painting had a certain charm, and the price was acceptable. The other strange thing was that the picture on the wall in the salon of the ballerina, that he had met many years ago on a train to Italy, had played a part in the sale of the painting.

When the Italian man saw the picture of the woman, he said right away that he knew the famous Russian dancer, and that the Man in the Blue Suit would receive a letter from her in the coming days. He winked, as he said this to him: "She is on a business trip

to Moscow at the moment, sir, but she will be back soon, and will be in touch with you."

The Italian man said that he kept in touch with her. He saw her often. He remembered her nickname was Twiggy, and so too did the Man in the Blue Suit. They both laughed when the Man in the Blue Suit said, "Yes, that's Twiggy all right, quite a girl," and from that moment on, the two men became friends.

"Oh, it was such a long time ago," lamented the Man in the Blue Suit. "If only all train journeys could be as entertaining as the one I had with Twiggy."

Apparently, Twiggy had been given the stage name many years ago, before she had entered into the art world. What had happened was that the nice Italian man had been given some money by her, and was told to go to the UK, and sell the painting, *Time Shadow*, to the Man in the Blue Suit. He admitted that apart from that, he did not know anything more about his mission, or indeed the painting.

Just then, the door opened of his salon, and in walked a strange man. He was dressed in a white overcoat, and his cropped hair was silver-gray; he looked about fifty. The small man walked right up to where the Man in the Blue Suit was sitting in his salon. As soon as he got there, he said to him in broken English: "My name is Mr Gromyko, I am from Moscow. Do you have a painting here titled, *Time Shadow*?" I believe an Italian man sold it to you."

There was something odd about this whole thing: for the day after the Man in the Blue Suit bought the painting from the nice Italian man, he read online that he had been killed in a car crash on the motorway, somewhere just outside the city centre. The police were appealing for witnesses; they said that the death was suspicious.

He looked at the man in front of him, and he tried to gather some facts from his appearance. The Russian man was not the type of man who usually stepped inside art galleries; the Man in the Blue Suit could tell this much about him. People he knew who bought art had a certain way with them; it was easily detected. He believed that men and women who sold and bought art were cap-

tured by it. The Italian man when he met him, he knew right away had an affiliation with the art world, but not this man.

The Man in the Blue Suit stared at the strange Russian man and, as he stood up, he said evenly, "It was terrible, I know, I read about it online. Do you know what happened to him?"

"Life is short, my friend," replied the Russian man in the white overcoat.

The Man in the Blue Suit knew this and, after he had looked out of the main salon window onto the street outside, he nodded in agreement with him. Then he sat back down in his wicker basket chair. This unsettled the Russian man, and he immediately changed the subject, "I was told that I would know your salon by the glass ship image on your door," and he too looked back round towards the window, "It's a nice salon you have here."

He spoke clearly, but his accent was foreign. The Man in the Blue Suit nodded: for he had put that little logo there next to the number on his property, not long after he had bought the salon. But what should he do with the painting that he had bought from the nice Italian man? He knew he had brought it with him all the way from Italy just to sell it to him. Then Twiggy had written a letter, a few days later, telling him that he should only sell it to someone called Olga at Nice, south of France. He reminded himself, Twiggy had sent him a cheque for expenses. He knew the Film Festival was on at Cannes at the same time. Should he go? It would be fun.

As he sat in his salon, he pondered what to do: "I wonder should I move the painting on, and sell it to this strange man here in the white overcoat and short grey hair, for a large profit, and get rid of it, and him?"

Mr Gromyko said that he was from the Art-Serve Foundation in Stockholm. However, he went on to say, "But I am really working for a British consortium. You see I have been commissioned to gather information about companies who are exporting modern art mainly to Eastern Europe, small and large companies are of interest to us. We know that many companies are selling modern paintings to Russia, at the moment. The foundation I represent

buys all types of art. We think your painting, *Time Shadow*, will fit into an exhibition we are putting on in the east. The exhibition is to be called: What's New in the West?"

The Man in the Blue Suit agreed with him "Yes, you are right; it is a charming painting, isn't it."

Mr Gromyko smiled at him, and then he looked at the painting he wanted to buy, behind the Man in the Blue Suit: "Yes, it was tragic that the Italian man died in a car crash. I believe he sold the painting to you the day before the accident." After saying this, he quickly went into his jacket pocket and brought out a press cutting about the event. And as he handed it to the Man in the Blue Suit he asked him, "Do you remember anything about him?"

As soon as he said this, he looked into the eyes of the Man in the Blue Suit. The gallery owner, even though the man smiled at him, detected there was something wrong with him. Of course, he acted normal and, after he had looked at the article put in front of him, he nodded solemnly and said: "No."

To avoid eye contact, the Man in the Blue Suit clicked the mouse beside the computer in front of him and brought up the National Gallery website. Then he leaned back in his favourite wicker basket chair and relaxed again. There was only one chair in his salon. He thought this a good idea: for all prospective buyers should stand before the great man. The Man in the Blue Suit searched the website in front of him for a time, and then he said as plainly as he could: "No, I don't remember everyone that comes in here - not even if they sell me a painting."

The Man in the Blue Suit knew the British and the Americans were trying to open up the minds of people in the east by exploring political ideas in paintings. It was well-known that the secret service dabbled in the art world. However, they never bought directly. He would now have to give it some thought as regards where this painting, *Time Shadow*, on the wall behind him, should go to.

"And Twiggy how does she fit into all of this?" he wondered to himself, "Why did she send me a letter, and some money, telling me to go to Nice, south of France, next week, and sell it to Olga?"

The Man in the Blue Suit wanted to get rid of him, but the Russian man was not shy about buying this painting. He wandered around the salon until he came to the one that fascinated him, situated behind the Man in the Blue Suit, and there he stopped and stared at it. "Ah, so this is *Time Shadow*."

The Man in the Blue Suit was intrigued too. Would you like a glass of wine? he asked him.

As the Russian man looked at the painting, *Time Shadow,* on the wall behind him, he said, "You know up until last year, I was of the opinion that modern art was whatever the person thought it to be, that was looking at it, but now I have changed my mind."

The Man in the Blue Suit did not take the bait, "Well, it's all wonderfully strange; some people think it has no meaning at all."

He could see that he was a very conservative man; he was good with words. He inferred without declaring too much. The Man in the Blue Suit thought he was working for some foreign government agency. When he took off his white coat he revealed a three-button dark suit; it was then he noticed his polished brogue shoes. It was plain to see that he had been educated at a private school. The Man in the Blue Suit thought himself a 'working class hero' to quote a well-known song. He did not like the privileged class.

The Russian man talked about a contact in Edinburgh, and how he had to meet him there later on that afternoon. "I have forgotten his name, but I am sure I will remember it before we meet again," he said looking at the empty glass on the table.

"Take the bus, it's cheaper," suggested the Man in the Blue Suit.

"Good idea, I will remember that," he replied.

Why did a Russian ballerina, that he had once met on a train journey many years ago, send a man all the way to Scotland just to sell him a painting? And why now did she want him to take it all the way to France, and sell it to someone named Olga? And why was this man, Mr Gromyko from Russia, so interested in buying it? Was the Italian man murdered? As the Man in the Blue Suit pondered these things, he poured his client some wine. He felt that in

this instance the best way to get rid of him was to make him feel welcome. The painting itself was plain, maybe there was something to it. However, if there was he could not see it.

"Have some wine, sir," he said, as he got up off his chair and handed it to him.

As they chatted about everything and nothing, the Man in the Blue Suit remembered how he had met the ballerina when he had been abroad on a business trip many years ago. They had met on a train going to Italy. They had shared some wine on the train going to Genoa, and the next day they went to Milan, and thereafter they went about hand in hand like lovers, through busy arcades, shops, galleries and restaurants.

One evening when went to the station to a cafe nearby, he remembered that he went up to a kiosk there to buy some cigarettes, and when he returned she was gone. All that was left was a note on the café table saying: 'Please remember me, Twiggy'.

The lady had vanished in such a matter of fact way that it seemed natural to him now many years later. She had left him *plante la* as the French say. The Man in the Blue Suit after reading the note outside the cafe bar was of course mystified. He remembered he sat down and drank some black coffee. The Man in the Blue Suit remembered too that he had even turned round and spoke to the woman at the next table from him. She was from San Sebastián, he recalled. Then he went back to his hotel, and left for home the next day.

That event took place almost twenty years ago, and then out of the blue an Italian man comes into his salon, and says that he has been told by a woman to approach him, and sell him a painting entitled, *Time Shadow*. She had instructed the man where to go and find him in Glasgow: for she knew he had a salon there in the middle of the city. She also knew that he would buy the painting from him when he heard who it was that had sent him.

"It's weird," the Man in the Blue Suit, thought to himself."

The Italian man, who sold the painting to him, had mentioned to him on several occasions what a lovely smile Twiggy had,

and how her face would always light up when she spoke about the Man in the Blue Suit, from Glasgow.

As he waited for this Russian man Mr Gromyko to leave his salon, he remembered again the famous train journey from Paris to Italy when he met Twiggy. The train was so busy they were both lucky to gets seats. He suddenly remembered how on that train she talked about a business partner, and how he was buying modern art and transporting it to Moscow. He had not thought about that until now. She had said that it was slightly awkward: for the Kremlin did not like the art establishment. When they got to Genoa, they had a wonderful time there eating in some of the best restaurants, and of course they stayed in the best hotel there.

During the day, they had wandered through the old streets and invariably ended up at their favourite bar near the harbour. It was there he had first noticed that things were not all that they appeared to be with Twiggy. One time when they had popped into a restaurant he remembered how Twiggy made a phone call on her mobile phone. He remembered how she had laughed and turned round to him and said: "I use the code name Twiggy, you know, when I am doing business. That's how I got the name."

The other recollection he had was that when he came back from the toilet he had overheard her say on the phone to someone, "No, I haven't found the painting yet, but I know where it is. I hope to get my hands on it next month. I will send it to you then…"

Looking back it was funny for the next day they went to Milan, and there Twiggy introduced him to the owner of the Butterfly Gallery; he had a Russian name too, but he could not remember it. The owner bought paintings from him. In what way was he connected to the ballerina? That day they had all celebrated together with champagne after they had signed the deal in his office. He remembered the owner was a man who enjoyed cigars, and he was passionate about paintings. There was a hint of homosexuality about him, but he knew that the Man in the Blue Suit was only interested in meeting women for sex, and he had not come onto him. His instructions were to him to send the paintings to the But-

terfly Gallery in Milan, when he returned to Scotland. The owner had then let slip that thereafter they would be sending them on to a flat in Moscow addressed to a man named Martin Davies. With great pride the buyer had showed him his eastern catalogue: "From a friend in Moscow," he had said to him.

They had drunk a lot of champagne on that trip especially in his gallery that day. It seemed almost like a dream now that strange trip to Italy: meeting the ballerina, visiting the Butterfly Gallery in Milan, the bars, and the restaurants they had visited in Genoa. The effect of champagne they had drunk that day seemed still real as if it were a never-ending vapour in his mind.

The Man in the Blue Suit remembered that as soon as the price was agreed for the paintings, the deal was struck, and they had celebrated with another glass of Champagne. The paintings were delivered, as per instructions to the Butterfly Gallery about a month later by the Man in the Blue Suit: for the cheque for them was on his desk when he returned home.

Why should the Man in the Blue Suit tell this story of what had happened in Milan to the man in front of him? The one thing he would not do was take down the painting behind him, *Time Shadow*, that the Italian man had sold to him, and sell it to this Russian man in front of him. Mr Gromyko was a phoney; he knew that much.

"Did you give a cheque or cash for the painting *Time Shadow*? ask Mr Gromyko, as he stared at the painting behind him.

"A cheque," answered the Man in the Blue Suit, quickly.

Mr Gromyko seemed transfixed with this information, and to keep the conversation going he asked the Man in the Blue Suit: "What did you do with it?"

The Man in the Blue Suit had a great sense of humour: "I always keep copies of my cheques, now where did I put it?" he murmured to himself, as he went through his desk drawer. "Ah here it is here."

And from that very drawer inside his desk, he produced a cheque for a million Euros. This was the first cheque he had received from a friend of his, when he had opened his salon. Of

course, he had never tried to cash it. In this same drawer were all the photocopies of all the cheques he had written, or cashed at the bank; the copy of the cheque he had written for the painting, *Time Shadow*, was there on top of the pile – but it would remain there.

The man from Russia took the million Euro cheque from him, and after a cold calculating look at it a faint smile crossed his pallid face. Presently, he put it down on the little table in front of him, finished his glass of wine, then he left the salon. When he was gone the Man in the Blue Suit had noticed that when he was there in the salon Hector his faithful German Shepherd dog had never really bothered with him, which was unusual, even when he tried to clap him he had wandered away.

When he was a young boy, the Man in the Blue suit had even felt part of the art world then. He did not know what that was, and now that he was older he often laughed to himself when he thought about it: for he still did not know what it was all about. However, when he met people he could usually tell if they were interested in art or not. He thought that most people had some kind of connection to art, and therefore the art world as he called it.

As a young boy, he was always drawing cartoons and copying faces from magazines and newspapers into his 'Big Art Book' as he called it then. There was still something wonderful about the world of the artist to him, and the art circles they moved in.

The Man in the Blue Suit had bought the salon twelve years ago with money that had been left to him from his parents. Life had changed radically between then and now. However, even now he was older he still went dancing every week in the city, and before going out he still played his favourite songs in his bedroom, just like he did when he was a teenager. The music was more synthesised now in the clubs, but he liked it.

When women came to see him at night, they invariably woke up beside him: for as you know by now, he was a great lover, so much so that the Man in the Blue Suit had trouble getting them to leave his apartment in the morning. One of his favourite ploys was to take them for lunch somewhere in the city centre. Then he would go back to work.

The Two Tattooed Woman sensed all of this, and she secretly wanted him. She like many others before her thought she could tame him. She had tried many times to get him into bed, but even when he had too much Rosè wine at his favourite bar, he had always been sober enough to avoid her advances.

2

Every Saturday night when he went out with his friend James, to the local nightclub, the Man in the Blue Suit always avoided vulgar woman. They turned him off. He often thought to himself: "I mean how can someone be attractive to you at the same time as making you feel that there is something wrong with you."

He knew that the Two Tattooed Woman was one such creature who could make you feel that way. The Man in the Blue Suit felt that she was after him. He was certainly not going to tell her the joke about the man with the beautiful cock, his favourite joke to the ladies. As soon as she spotted him in the bar, she was over like a shot beside him, pushing her small pointed breasts into the side of his body. And after she had a glass of wine, or two, she would invariably start to rub his bottom. When he did not respond to her advances, she would usually scream and shout: "Yer aff yer heid, Blue Man!"

He knew that he could repel her advances by just saying something kind to her like. "Oh, you have lovely eyes, and you make them up so well, too. How did you learn to do that?"

He had found this out early on in their relationship. When she heard him say things like this she would scream even louder

and protest: "I know what you are up to - you're just taking the mickey, Blue Man."

As has been said, The Man in the Blue Suit avoided women who drank a lot: for he thought them vulgar. They did not make good lovers, and moreover they looked terrible in the morning. A woman should wait to be made loved to by a man like him. She should not be uptight in anyway before, or after, lovemaking. She should not drink too much, have promiscuous sex, or eat more than she should. She should dress well, always be polite and wait patiently for him to undress her. He would not disappoint her.

The Man in the Blue Suit did not like carrying a mobile phone with him: for it tied him to the world. However, having said that, he had to carry one these days: for he was responsible for an elderly aunt. She was at a very interesting stage in her life now. She kept telling him that there were angels floating above his head making all the decisions for him, before he could do anything about it. This was terrific stuff, just the kind of thing he liked to hear. He really admired someone who could dismiss the mundane world around them, and look into other dimensions for answers to complex questions. The mystery of life, he knew lay outside the manmade world. This was not just interesting - it was fascinating. The old woman would sometimes call him up in the middle of the night, and tell him private things about her life. Sometimes she would cry, but sometimes she would sing down the phone to him. Her favourite ditty was: *"I'm nobody's pal, yes you're nobody's pal, no one to talk to, and never a smile, day in and day out, I wait for a break, but you are a loser and you're nobody's pal."*

In response to that, The Man in the Blue Suit would sometimes sing down the phone to her his favourite Italian love song *La Stagione dell'amore*. The lovely song would usually calm her down, and she would put down the phone and fall fast asleep.

The Man in the Blue Suit loved nothing better than to relax after breakfast; sometimes he watched a blue movie, after all he loved everything blue. When he got fed up with that, he would read a book, or he would go for a long walk through the city. He

did not put on his Blue Suit until he was working, or ready to meet a client, lady-friend, or mate.

He watched everyone and everything around him, but only certain people fascinated him. The Man in the Blue Suit really fixed onto people he liked; he could imagine himself with them, on some beach, or dancing with them in some nightclub in the south of France. Packs of women fascinated him too; they were like one body without a leader, usually they spoke openly about what they had already acquired in life, and moreover what was due to them. They were together, yet apart from each other. He had to get in amongst them, and take the most fancied one home with him, or go with her to a hotel room somewhere close by.

He had once held the view that sex was a private thing between people. However, today people were sharing their sexual experiences with others in videos, photos and on web cams. Every day, he heard people openly discussing the wonders of sex with each other. Some people were really interesting. He loved talking to women about sex. He thought about what they had said when they were gone. If he saw a single lady in a café bar he would wonder about her sex life, before she even said a word to him. The Man in the Blue Suit loved women. In fact, his fascination for them took him to faraway places in search of them. However, he knew he had to return to his business, and of course this would bring him back to the Two Tattooed Woman: the woman who cleaned his salon every morning for him, and who in a strange way typified the bizarre culture of his home city.

Even though she was his nemeses the Man in the Blue Suit had time for the Two Tattooed Woman, and when he saw who it was this morning standing there outside his salon, waiting to get in, he smiled to himself. Yes, it was quite a site to see her standing there with her brush and pail, and her fag in her mouth. The Man in the Blue Suit was a very kind and generous man; he even allowed her to smoke inside his salon.

Right on cue that morning after ringing the bell in she came into his salon: "Aye yer back then, where did you get to this time Mr Jetsetter?"

The Man in the Blue Suit always made her laugh. For something to say, he told her what had happened to him on his last trip abroad: "You know I booked this hotel online for a hotel in Italy, only to find when I got there that the Hotel Sorrento was in Sydney, Australia, and the one in Italy didn't have a room for me. This led to an argument in Italian, and the woman there threatened me with the Carabiniere."

This was true for the Man in the Blue Suit had insisted that he had a room booked for him, but the young Italian woman behind the desk got so angry with him that she flared up and sent for the Carabiniere. The Man in the Blue Suit had to escape to a Thomson hotel just round the corner. Lucky for him, he met the rep on the bus on the way from the airport, and she had told him where she was staying. When he got there she got a room for him right away. It was a pleasant hotel. Most women liked the Man in the Blue Suit as soon as they met him: for he had charm and good looks.

He had gone to Italy to see Ina, an artist friend. She had emailed him a few weeks before, and told him that she was in trouble with her work. She was an attractive girl. As soon as he met her at the resort, he could see in her face she was troubled. Whatever it was that was troubling her was stopping her from producing beautiful abstract paintings. Her work was usually very colourful, and full of character. She was fascinated by the faces she saw around her on the street. "Only an artist can see and understand the real world portrayed in a passing face on the street," she had told him in an earlier e-mail. "Please come over and help me."

Of course, the Man in the Blue Suit responded to the emotional call. He agreed with her. He had sympathy with the artist. The Man in the Blue Suit knew that everything in life was put on for a show. However, when the veil was temporary lifted it only needed a second, or two, for a natural look to enlighten an artistic mind. Sometimes, he would tap the side of his head and say to his friends: "Only an artist can understand what is going on in here, you know."

When he met Ina in Italy he gave her a big hug. The Man in the Blue Suit was famous for hugging friends. Sometimes hugging could go on for four or five minutes. This time, however, to cheer her up the Man in the Blue Suit before kissing Ina, told her: "You know I love to see the look in your eyes, before I kiss you."

The Man in the Blue suit had a way with women. She may not have looked at her best at that moment, but he could see he had made her feel good, and that was important to him. He loved to see people laughing and smiling. Lovemaking, he knew always made things better. The young artist seemed happy when he left her a few days later.

When he was in his teens the Man in the Blue Suit had been a singer in a local jazz band. His friends in the band were all from art school. He was the only one working at that time. This was when he first wore his famous blue suit. Now that he was older he once more wore a blue suit, not the same one of course; the old one was somewhere at the back of his wardrobe. He had got another one especially made from his tailor in the south of France. The tailor knew the exact colour of blue he wanted.

The Man in the Blue Suit loved the south of France, and as soon as spring appeared he was there wearing his famous blue suit. Even though he was over fifty now, he was fast becoming a star along the Riviera. He was into electronic pop, and he visited all the chic nightclubs along the south of France. He loved to listen to the music there and dance the night away. Sometimes, he danced on the beach at night to the summer grooves the DJ played there by the sea. It was wonderful. He was always invited to parties; for everyone liked the Man in the Blue Suit, especially the women. He had many DJ friends in Europe from the clubs there. They were all crackpots: "All lost in the mix," as he put it.

They were nice even though they were distant. They had their own language and culture. Everything was cool, on the edge - groovy. There was no better feeling for them than people gathered together on the beach, or in a nightclub, dancing to their groovy beach music. Women were at their best when they were dressed to

the hilt and ready to dance. In the south of France at night, the nightclubs were simply wonderful.

As soon as he met new friends, he made it known to them that he disliked politics, or any sort of interference on the individual as regards the state. "Humans are happy creatures when their minds are free," he told them.

The French loved him for this, especially when he spoke to them about freedom: "The English think they are free. They are free only during the election of members of parliament," he sometimes quoted Rousseau to them.

The Man in the Blue Suit was of the opinion that humans, for whatever reason, were always being interfered with by state regulations. The state did this without much care about their lives. Consequently, people were always worried about what the state was up to. Even so called friends who were not political could intrude upon others. The solution was to avoid regulation, and interference of others, by the state, at home, or abroad: "You must be ready to counter it when it surfaces," he warned them.

People he knew were always trying to interfere with your free thoughts, but the secret was not to let anything affect you in anyway. This was the way the Man in the Blue suit looked at life now. Freedom to him was when you escaped regulation and interference from people working for the state, and other agencies in the private sector. "Humans are always trying to tie others up by attaching to them all sorts of strange things," was another of his favourite sayings.

Due to the train network, it was the French side of the Riviera he would travel first to. The train was very fast from Paris to Nice. However, he would always visit the Italian side places like, Ventimiglia, and San Remo.

When he was in the south of France the Man in the Blue Suit felt French; as long as he was away from the cold Scottish weather, and the negative attitude of the people that lived there he was happy. And when he crossed the border the Man in the Blue Suit felt Italian of course. He felt that the country of his birth had nothing in it remaining of its past. It was modern in every sense

now. The traditional way of Scottish life had all but disappeared,: all that was left was a half-baked European culture.

The entrepreneurs who had opened up bars and restaurants and other businesses had swept away the old culture. This had happened in every other sector of industry. For the past twenty years, whatever had opened up had no connection with the country's cultural past. Moreover, a new European city culture had developed. Of course, there was a kitsch tartan culture still around, but that was for the common herd. For whatever reason, a strange European culture had been brought to Scotland, and the people had embraced it, and therefore the past had been lost. The language was different too, many American sayings were used in most sentences, it was a polite use of the English language that was spoken now.

Not so with the Man in the Blue Suit; he could remember what the traditions of his country were, and although he travelled extensively throughout Europe, he knew his past and it was part of him. "The great man remembers where he comes from, as he embraces life around him," was another of his favourite sayings.

The Man in the Blue Suit had many fascinations in life, but above all he was fascinated by what it was that made someone attractive. He often thought long and hard about this: "I wonder what it is that makes someone attractive to me? Is it a shape, or colour, a feeling, a mood? What a wonderful mystery life is."

Lopsided love was of no interest to the Man in the Blue Suit, if a woman liked him, and he liked her, and she was available, then that was that: "I wonder why women are so attractive to me?" he often asked himself.

The Man in the Blue Suit did not only dress well; he was friendly and kind. He admitted to others that he did not fully understand the world around him. Life was indeed a mystery to him. The world he could see was full of tragedy, but there were many people into that kind of thing. He could see in their faces they were overcome by it, but the strange thing was they embraced it. What it was that made someone unattractive to another was just as interesting to him as the reverse. He knew he had something

women wanted, and if they were available, unmarried and attractive, then he would lie with them and make love with them. Life was a wonderful mystery to the Man in the Blue Suit. Lovemaking to him was everything.

He was also fascinated by the way humans acted with material objects, especially when they were buying presents for each other: for very few people he could see could actually make up their minds what they wanted to buy. They had to consult friends. The Man in the Blue Suit knew that lovers had to give each other the right presents, and that great care should be taken over this.

The Man in the Blue Suit marvelled at material things, and the way they excited people, but he knew that only love could fulfil a person in this life. Everything else was an illusion. Love was more than an illusion. Products that were good for people, or at least made them happy for a time, were interesting to him, and so were products that turned out to be not so good for the recipient. Every object had a place in life. It had come from somewhere, and it had the potential of being moved to somewhere else.

The Man in the Blue Suit every day wrote down his philosophical thoughts. He wrote then down into his Matisse diary; he had bought the diary at the beginning of the year at Vence inside the shop there next to the famous chapel. He was very philosophical about life. He loved making up stories and characters for them. He loved asking questions too.

In fact, just last week when they were out in town, he had said to James his friend: "One night in a restaurant two glasses of wine were poured from the same bottle. After finishing his glass of wine one man goes home and makes love to his wife. The other man, on the other hand, goes home and murders his wife. What part did the wine play: for both had the same amount of wine inside the restaurant?"

James was stunned by this, and right away admitted to him: "I have no idea."

The Man in the Blue Suit thought that everything in life must have been made for some kind of purpose, and to understand this

purpose was surely a clue was it not to life itself: "You have to be part of the mystery to understand it," he often said to friends.

As he danced at parties along the Riviera, and at home, the Man in the Blue Suit thought up new ways to set his soul free: for he did not like being tied to the world. The world to him was full of unhappiness, greed and corruption.

"I will be back after lunch," he said to the Two Tattooed Woman.

She looked at him, and then she bent down and picked up a loose piece of paper that had fallen under the window. And as she dropped it into her pail she pulled a face and snapped: "I know where you're going - you're going to pick up some bird in a bar, Blue Man, I know you."

It was her laugh that was outrageous; it was like an old banger car trying to start up. The Man in the Blue Suit found it hilarious and laughed, along with her. Then he left his salon. As usual, he walked by the hairdressers' shop on his way to his favourite café bar. The staff inside the shop there that day, when they saw him go by the window, all stopped what they were doing and watched him. Today there were four stylists in the shop working. The owner, Samantha was the only one in the shop who knew the Man in the Blue suit. Becky, who had not long started in the salon, after returning from America, however was the first to speak. She quite innocently said to the others, as he passed by the window: "There goes the man with the beautiful cock."

She must have heard about his famous joke to the ladies, and all the girls in the salon laughed. Everyone continued to stare out of the window. The junior, who was washing a client's hair, innocently asked her: "I wonder why they call him that?"

Becky standing close by said with a wink: "For he tells a funny story about a farmer who sells chickens."

The owner smiled to herself; she knew him from the clubs in town, and meeting him on the street. She liked him, but due to her circumstances she had never been out with him: for she had a son, and the Man in the Blue Suit stayed clear of married women. Although, if truth be told he was not all that sure if she was married;

he was ready to charm her, if he found out she was single and available for lovemaking.

Samantha, the owner of the hair salon, was quick to point out to the others: "He is always smartly dressed, don't you think?"

"Is he married," Cynthia asked her.

The owner replied: "No."

"Has he never been married?" asked Cynthia again.

"No," replied the owner.

The junior, who was just about to wash her client's hair, inquired: "Where does the Man in the Blue Suit come from?

The owner who had met him just recently turned and smiled at her: "He lives upstairs from his art gallery, just along the road from our salon."

"What's he like?" asked the junior.

"Strange but nice," the owner replied.

"Does he always dress in a blue suit, white shirt, and Moccasin shoes?" asked Cynthia.

"I hear he has many lady-friends," added the junior as if it were a secret.

The owner nodded and softly said, "He travels a lot."

The junior was very interested in him now, and she asked her: "Where does he go to when he goes abroad?"

None of the workers in the salon knew, and they all looked at the owner for an answer. Presently, the owner put forward some suggestions: "France, Germany, Italy, Spain, I guess."

"Where does he go during the day?" asked the junior.

Cynthia seemed to know, "I have seen him in some of the well-known establishments in the city, where the rich go."

The owner smiled: "He is very charming. You hear him singing to himself when you pass him by on the street."

"Is he over 50 asked the junior?"

The woman under the dryer at this point looked out of the window.

No one answered, "Does he have a girlfriend?" added the junior.

Cynthia looked at the owner, then she turned round and said to the junior: "You should get to know the man with the beautiful cock," and everyone laughed.

There was always a lot of interest in town about the Man in the Blue Suit, and no wonder: for he looked so different from everyone else. He cared little about what people thought of him. He just acted normal, wherever he went.

He knew how to charm women all right: "The Man in the Blue Suit can see into the future, you know," he was always telling his girlfriends. They loved it when he said this to them. "Love is waiting for you, my dear, just think how wonderful life is going to be."

This was a rare gift indeed, knowing how to excite women, just by using words. And it was such a dismal time too in Europe: the economy was faltering and the de rigueur culture of the day waning. Some people even doubted that they had a future, and here was a man in a Blue Suit going about confident as to what lay in front of him in life. The Man in the Blue Suit was in great demand by the opposite sex. Everywhere he went, he proclaimed everything to be rosy in the garden: "Yes, life is worth living," he told everyone with a smile when he met them.

The Man in the Blue Suit's dog Hector was a lovely old German Shepherd dog. There were not many German Shepherd dogs in the city centre of Glasgow. In fact, he was the only one. He was such an unusual dog too. Hector knew that he was a bit of a celebrity in town. When he went out walking with the Man in the Blue Suit, he followed him everywhere he went. Business friends of the Man in the Blue Suit maintained that he was becoming like the philosopher Emanuel Kant, as regards his timekeeping. Certainly this was true for the women who worked in the chic department store, not far from his salon: for someone there one day was overheard to remark, as he passed by their shop window: "You know you can set your watch by that Man in the Blue Suit."

It was true for every day at 3 pm, he would take Hector round the block, a small group of shops, then down the hill, past the bookmakers shop, then he would visit the local tearoom, and

there he would order one pot of tea, and a scone and jam. Hector the dog always waited outside for him at the café bar. The dog had nearly as many admirers in the city centre as the Man in the Blue Suit; the waitresses made a fuss of Hector when they saw him. They would come out and give him some water. One young waitress even bought, and kept, digestive biscuits for him in the café bar, after hearing that Hector was fond of them.

In the tearoom that day, he thought about his two friends Bertie and James; they were completely different from him, and from each other. One was secretive, who thought himself among the world's elite. The other was a business man who had not forgotten his tough upbringing in a hard city; he was now erudite on most mundane things. The former was non committal while the latter was super efficient, particularly about arrangements. This made the relationship difficult and comical at the same time: one trying to nail social appointments, while the other trying to evade them. Just recently the latter had reported to the Man in the Blue Suit that the former was gay. They were opposites in every sense. The strange thing was that the two of them had time for the Two Tattooed Woman. As he picked up his teapot, the Man in the Blue Suit smiled to himself: "They maybe different from each other in every way. However, they find common ground, and somehow understand each other."

It was amazing how you could pick up all sorts of information in the tearoom: "Life is strange," the Man in the Blue Suit would often say to himself, when he heard of someone passing away.

Indeed, the Man in the Blue Suit at his age had known many people who had passed away. And when he was young, it had really affected him, and it still affected him now, although in a different way. He would genuinely think of the person that had gone, but he would celebrate his life as best as he could. The passing on of a living soul did not disturb his enjoyment of life. He was amazed though: for as soon as a friend, or acquaintance, had passed away he was mocked by the people he once knew. "He's

deid," they would say, and his memory was almost extinguished from their minds at that point.

The Man in the Blue Suit wanted to live life to the full. He loved travelling. He still loved meeting people, and celebrating life with them. At his age, he was still learning about life. Modern life was so interesting to him. The way people met each other, and how they fell in love. Life was at its best when it was normal and natural: for then it was unbelievable. His great fascination was still what made someone attractive to another.

"People from all over the world at this moment are falling in love with each other, what a wonderful thought that is," he said to the waitress who brought him over his bill. And as he picked it up off the silver plate, he looked into her dark eyes and said: "Nicola do you know that lovers never charge each other anything."

The Man in the Blue Suit wanted to share love, and the thrill of life made him happy just thinking about it. The waitress did not know what to make of him, so she just smiled.

Davy was a young man who worked in a bar at night in town, but during the day he was a courier for a large international delivery firm. He rode a fixed wheel bike with small handlebars, and delivered letters and small parcels to private businesses in the city centre. On his way home, he always popped into see the Man in the Blue Suit in his art salon. He had nothing for him tonight, but that did not matter. On the way there to his salon every evening, he always wondered what sort of questions to ask the Man in the Blue Suit. Davy, you see, promised himself that one day he would be like the Man in the Blue Suit. Above all things, he wanted to be admired by women. He often wondered what it was that made the Man in the Blue Suit so happy and confident about life.

If truth be told, he did not know all that much about the Man in the Blue Suit, but he had heard one thing that there had been some kind of a disaster in his life. He had heard that many years ago at the toll, near to where he had been born, there had been a gas explosion, and some of his friends had been killed. He did not know if this was true or not. But he could not fail to see how women looked at him and admired him.

Davy was never on time due to the traffic in the city centre; he sometimes arrived before five, but more often than not after it. However, when he arrived at the salon he was always greeted with a friendly: "Hello," by the Man in the Blue Suit.

Hector the dog knew Davy too; he always got up from his favourite spot under the window, and went over and wagged his tail at him. However, this evening for some reason, Hector was asleep when Davy entered the salon. In any event, Davy stopped to look up at the picture on the wall not far from the door. And there he stared at the beautiful ballerina in the photograph; the woman the salon owner had met on a train journey many years ago. He had for some reason not set eyes on this photograph before, even though it had been there since the opening day of the art gallery.

"Ah, Davy my boy, come in."

"Who is the beautiful woman in the photograph?" Davy asked him, hardly thinking about it.

As the Man in the Blue Suit walked over to him he smiled: for his thoughts drifted to the past. Then in a faraway voice he said to him: "She was the love of my life, you know."

"It's a lovely photograph. Where was it taken?"

"The picture was taken in Milan. We met on a train going to Genoa. She was young then, only sixteen. Someone must have booked our seats opposite each other. She was going to a fashion show in Milan, and I was on a business trip selling paintings to a Russian owner of a gallery there. I believe the picture was taken inside the Butterfly Gallery."

Turning round and looking at the photograph again Davy asked him in his usual impudent way: "Where did you get that tie, Blue Man?"

"From my Aunt Jeanie," answered the Man in the Blue Suit honestly, and he too laughed.

Davy smiled at the Man in the Blue Suit and, as he clapped the dog that had just come over to see him, the gallery owner declared: "Life my friend is not something that you every truly understand, you know."

He then spoke to Davy, in a very personal way: "She was hidden inside the image of her own making, but then again all women are mysterious. Women like to lock themselves away. You have to unlock their personalities, before you can understand them. They only respond to emotion. I remember that day; I took her bag and we walked on through the crowded street to the hotel. We talked about everything and nothing, like new and old friends do when they meet. Major European cities seem to be made for this kind of adventure. The people who inhabit them do not really care what people do, as long as they do not cause any public disorder, they are free to carry on with their liaisons."

Hector before he settled back down again, under the window, he went over to the Man in the Blue Suit. The kind dog rubbed up against his master's legs as if to show sympathy for the love affair lost in the past. The Man in the Blue Suit, as he clapped Hector could not help but remember the trip: for this was the only time, after returning from abroad, he had ever received a cheque from a foreign buyer.

3

It was a modern digital world now with people uploading home-made films. Some of the films were just unbelievable. They took you into their bedrooms at night time. People sent messages to each other, inviting others to have sex with them. And yet when he walked out into the every day world of bars, restaurants, baker's shops, coffee houses and restaurants, people were very much like they had been when he was a boy. The Man in the Blue Suit was thrilled by it all, and yes still baffled by it.

He could hear music playing in his head when he thought about some of the women he had been with. Everyone he believed possessed rhythm, some more than others. The Man in the Blue Suit just by looking at someone could feel their rhythm. He sometimes imagined them on a beach with him, somewhere in the south of France, coming alive as the pulse in the music made them more aware of the presence of each other: for he knew life came at you from others around you. The Man in the Blue Suit always walked with a smile on his face; for he had a happy rhythm inside him. He made love with that happy rhythm.

The way the Man in the Blue Suit thought everything had rhythm; his use of words had rhythm too. He believed rhythm was in everything in life. Everyone, every thing, had rhythm. Some-

times it flowed naturally other times not. When things were not going so well he knew that the rhythm could be upset, and life could become strange. Rhythm was energy he reckoned. Love-making had rhythm. In fact, all things in life that were in motion had rhythm. The time of day had its own rhythm, and so too did grandpa and grandma. The lazy man had a rhythm, and so too did the whore.

The Man in the Blue Suit was fascinated by people who did not like him. He never showed this though. What got into them he did not know? He preferred it when they avoided him. He knew some people in public were friendly to him, but behind closed doors they chanted for his downfall. This was very interesting indeed.

Yes, it was so easy to become friends in the modern digital world: you could send an email, a text message, call someone on the telephone, but invariably, the majority did not want to meet in person, and the relationship became a virtual one, and not such a good one for the soul. On the other hand, there were people who were so overcome with passion for him that they became silly. The Two Tattooed Woman was one such person. She was funny though, for he knew she was a good soul with a social problem. Then there were the selected ones who wanted to extract love from him, but not to give it back to him in return.

The Man in the Blue Suit wanted to meet more people. He did not want to avoid relationships just because of all the ones that had fallen by the wayside. He wanted to kiss a new cheek every day, to lie with a new friend every other day. He wanted to look into the eyes of someone he had not come across before and say to them, as he made love to them: "You are beautiful."

Getting older was not an option for the Man in the Blue Suit; he would stay young. Yes, of course the rhythm of life changed as time went on, but rhythm was life inside itself. He would always dance, love and be happy. The moaners, groaners, and croakers were everywhere in this immoral world. He would avoid them. He heard them everywhere he went. Some men he knew thought all women over a certain age were fat and ugly, and every bar and

club was now full of trash. They were funny, but he would have to watch out for them; he knew that misanthropy was the Devil's work. He did not want to become unhappy.

Katie who was working in town selling credit cards in an office one day popped into the salon of the Man in the Blue Suit. It was to change her life. She was so taken by his appearance that she spoke to him at once. The Man in the Blue Suit had a talent for matching faces to voices; he had heard her on the phone before, trying to chat him up. He knew that it was her that had phoned just the other day, but he did not say. Naturally, she asked him about all the paintings in his salon. Then after studying them she said to him in a curious tone: "There is something about that one behind you, you know, the one titled, *Time Shadow*."

Like most women Katie, immediately confided in the Man in the Blue Suit. She had been wondering what it must be like to have your picture looked at by men all over the world. It is fair to say that all modern young women now were go-getters. The magazines and the press bamboozled them with images and stories about how to be happy. They told them how to get what they wanted out of life. Very few who read their columns did not follow their advice. Katie's great fear was that her youthful beauty would not be recorded properly before she reach thirty, and thereafter it would be lost to the world.

In his salon as he picked up a large expensive camera, the Man in the Blue suit shouted: "Smile!" and he snapped a picture of her: "There you are my dear, now your image has been captured for posterity."

Katie smiled back and was just about to say something to him when a woman with two young kids, one at each side, came rushing into the salon. The woman instantly detected the friendly atmosphere between Katie and the Man in the Blue Suit, and broke it up, "I was just wondering if you took pictures of boys and girls too; I would like one for a family album, you see? "Do you do that sort of thing?"

Katie smiled at the wee boy next to her; then she bent down and kissed him. She had that look in her eyes after she had kissed

him that she had countered the intrusion. You see she knew she was part of the real world, as well as the exciting world of a young single woman. Katie knew how the world worked, and moreover how modern women worked in it. The young boy smiled at her, and he too looked up at the painting, *Time Shadow*, behind the Man in the Blue Suit: "I want that painting, mummy!"

Every one turned round and looked at it. There followed a strange silence. "Oh, I don't take pictures for a living," said the Man in the Blue Suit. "But there is a camera shop just round the corner from here. I know they have some great discounts on at the moment, ask for Chris there."

On hearing this, the woman said: "Right we are off, there is no time to waste," and she dragged the children with her out of his salon.

Hector was just about to wander over and see what was going on, but when he saw that the guests were all leaving, he slumped back down, again under the window, and there he lay quite happily. He had seen it all before.

After they had gone the Man in the Blue Suit looked into the camera again and, as he adjusted the focus, he said compassionately: "Every doll has her day. Come on smile, now!" and he snapped another picture of Katie.

The next person to pop into his salon was a tourist with a *Lonely Planet* guide book in his hand. He was looking for directions to Queen Street train station: "Did you say Queer Street? joked the Man in the Blue Suit.

When he was gone the Man in the Blue Suit sat down in his wicker basket chair, and asked Katie about what type of modelling she wanted to do. "Have you modelled before, my dear?" he asked her tenderly.

Katie stood in front of him and moved her hips slowly, as if she was going to dance. He thought she was going to blush, but she didn't'. "You have a lovely figure. Let's meet for a drink and talk about it," suggested the Man in the Blue Suit.

The next day was Sunday; it was a lovely sunny day. The Drum, situated just round the corner on St. Vincent Street, was

where they had arranged to meet at 1 pm. When the Man in the Blue Suit got there, he stood on the corner and waited for her. However, when he saw Katie standing across the road outside the bank he waved over at her. She looked enchanting, he thought, dressed in her white cotton mini dress, as she ran across the quiet road to meet him. The city was always different on a Sunday, no matter the weather. Today it was sunny in town, and the streets were nearly empty.

Inside the bar a quaint group of people, mainly couples, were sitting there. Some were talking, others not. The silent ones were all looking away from the pleasure zone at the bar, as if waiting for more people to arrive so as to give the place more atmosphere. They would be happy with more people around them.

The young barman with the beard behind the bar smiled to himself; for he knew all of this. He also knew that the people sitting here and there inside the bar, just like the Man in the Blue Suit, and the young lady in the sexy white cotton dress, who had just entered his establishment, had made arrangements to be here today, and it was his duty to be happy and serve them.

"What can I get you, sir?" he said smiling.

The Man in the Blue Suit rarely drank alcohol in the afternoon; he was surprised though when Katie said that she only wanted a fresh orange juice.

"Friday night was the girls' night out after work," she told him, "And last night I stayed in to watch a film to recover."

They sat opposite the bar inside the elevated seating area on comfortable leather seats. Katie had been thinking for some time now, she wanted to be someone, not for long, but for a short time. Thereafter, she would drift back into obscurity. She liked the thought of being anonymous, after being famous. Yes, that appealed to her. She wanted to become a model, and opposite the bar in the Drum she asked the Man in the Blue Suit, if he could help her achieve this.

"Oh it's a lot of fun, my dear being out of the limelight," he joked with her playing the game.

The Man in the Blue Suit sat back. He was not evasive, but he never pushed anyone in any direction. His philosophy in life was live and let live, and let people find their own way through it.

Katie told him: "I have just been offered some video work; it's good money too."

After picking up an empty glass and moving it over to the edge of the table, he smiled at her: "It sounds awfully grand and important."

Apparently, an agency from America wanted to send video pictures of her by satellite all around the globe; it was part of their drive to promote free love to other countries.

"The money is top dollar." she said and laughed.

Katie had not thought about the money before, but now she had she was keen to talk about it. "The money is unbelievable," she reported and for some reason she stared at the Man in the Blue Suit.

In a professional tone, he asked her "What does it entail?"

"They want me and another model to have sex in front of the camera. They will hire a hotel suite for the video shoot. The film will last for about an hour they say. We will be able to take breaks, from time to time, between the scenes. The film is to be shot quite soon; there will also be lots of still photos taken."

Katie said that she was interested in what the video company was saying to her: for she wanted to liberate men and women in faraway oppressed countries. "Anyone with a computer will have a chance to pick up the movie. Of course, I will change my name; maybe I will wear a wig."

Katie laughed and openly wondered what her stage name should be. "What do you think? she asked smiling.

The Man in the Blue Suit suggested one: "The Blue Woman" and he smiled too.

"I asked them if I could bring along my own partner for the shoot."

"Good idea," replied the Man in the Blue Suit.

"I believe men get paid less though," she said to him in a low tone.

He was of course wondering why she was telling him all of this.

"Would you like to do it with me?"

The Man in the Blue Suit nearly laughed out loud, but he did not. "It is very good of you asking me, but I am just about to go abroad," he said with a huge grin on his face.

Katie had not long started working in town, and she had organised herself in a businesslike manner. She took her small computer diary out, and asked the Man in the Blue Suit if he knew a hotel where they could go and shoot the movie. She wanted to recommend one to the film company the next time they emailed her.

He thought about one, then he recommended another in the west end, and gave her the name of it: "Yes, it's quite plush, and they are very discreet."

When the waiter arrived with the drinks, the Man in the Blue Suit took the teapot from him and poured himself a strong cup of tea. He never took milk or sugar. Then he immediately went into his top pocket took out a small digital camera and said, "Smile, just so that I can say I knew you before you were famous!"

The Man in the Blue Suit was wondering what to say next; for it was not every day he was drinking with a potential movie star. Presently, they moved from the bar to a plush restaurant in the city centre, and there they had a lovely meal. Katie had not been there before, but she had heard of it, and she liked it. It was not long till they arrived back at his salon. The Man in the Blue Suit took her there by taxi, and after a glass of Rosè wine, and some popcorn, downstairs in the salon, he took her upstairs to his flat. There he watched her undress. Katie played to the invisible camera in her mind. He knew that she would soon be undressing for many lonely men out there in bedrooms, and in living rooms, all over the world. There was nothing unhealthy in her sexuality - she knew that. She told him earlier that she had been watching sex films since high school. "There is an art form to sex, you know, and all the actors and actresses follow a certain code," she informed him.

She thought she would be someone in the industry one day, but after making love with the Man in the Blue Suit she had second thoughts. This was real sex; there was something real about him to her. He penetrated her and went with her to the edge of ecstasy. The only problem was that she knew that, like many women before her, the Man in the Blue Suit was a great lover, and women fell in love with him not long after meeting him. When she thought about it, the combination of love and sex with him seemed to thrill her beyond her understanding. The two afternoon lovers enjoyed themselves no end; the lovemaking seemed endless even though it stopped, and started again.

About an hour later Katie went downstairs to the gallery to collect her bag: for she had left her cigarettes in it. When she returned she took out her lipstick and laughed, and said to him: "I didn't' know you had a silent partner?"

The Man in the Blue Suit was standing at the mirror fixing his tie when she came back into the bedroom. He didn't' know he had one either: "Describe him to me?" he said in a comic voice. "Is he as handsome as me?"

"No, he is not as handsome as you; he is small with grey hair, and wears a white coat."

Mr Gromyko had returned to his salon to look at the painting *Time Shadow*?" This sobered him up.

"What was he doing?"

"Not a lot when he saw me, even though I had this towel round me, he fled out of the gallery in a hurry, as if I was going to seduce him."

The Man in the Blue Suit put on his jacket, and went downstairs to see what was going on. He knew he had locked the front door: for he remembered putting the key in his suit pocket before going upstairs with Katie. When he got there, he was glad to see that all the paintings were still there. He checked the painting, *Time Shadow*, again before he came back upstairs. He was pleased to see that there did not seem to be anything untoward or missing from it.

He walked to the front door of the gallery. The door was slightly ajar; he shut it and locked it again from the inside. When he got back to his apartment, he asked Katie: "What was the man in the white coat doing?"

"He was just standing there staring at the painting behind your desk."

"Nothing else?"

"No,"

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, he was a strange man. He tried to smile, but he hurried off before I could ask him anything."

And as she let the lipstick container drop back inside her fashionable red bag, she reprimanded him: "You should not let people wander around your salon when you are not there."

"No," I shouldn't', should I," said the Man in the Blue Suit.

So the Russian man, Mr Gromyko, had returned to look at the painting *Time Shadow*. He would have to change the lock on the front door, and take the picture down. He would put it upstairs in his apartment. He sensed that this man from Russia, Mr Gromyko, was a professional spy. He had not had enough time to steal the painting, or he would not have left without it. He would be back though.

4

The Man in the Blue Suit had a great philosophy; he reckoned that to avoid illness you had to avoid being unhappy. He knew that happiness was great for health. You had to avoid being at war with the world, and yourself. You must celebrate life, with others, past and present. You must be generous, loving, kind, and of course outgoing. The world is full of court cases where people every day are at each other's throats, past events tormenting their souls. Some people he had noticed were in conflict not just with others, but with time itself - that was a very strange thing indeed to understand.

Before he left the flat at night the Man in the Blue Suit always played his favourite Italian love songs. The evening always got under way for him by listening to music. You see just by listening to his favourite love songs he could escaped the demonic corrupt world around him. His favourite Italian artist was Franco Battiato. In the evening he would meet a friend, and they would then go for a meal, or they would take in a concert somewhere in the city.

The Man in the Blue Suit loved watching French films before going to bed at night. After the film, he usually watched a sex film. Sex films were quite interesting, not all of them were a turn off. He liked it when they spoke Italian or French. In the modern

world people now with their handheld devices were filming themselves in all sorts of positions, and uploading them to the World Wide Web for others to view.

The Man in the Blue Suit after breakfast always did some yoga exercises, and then he would write to some friends on the computer. He always used the language of love. He knew he could make people feel good about life by just saying a few words to them in an e-mail. He knew that a kind word at the right time, in the right context, could make someone happy. Some of his lady friends on the continent waited days for one of his passionate emails. Sometimes he would write them love poems, or send pictures of himself. His French was basic, his Italian good, but his English was wonderful. Many people on the continent spoke English now, so it was easy for him to get to know them.

After breakfast the Man in the Blue Suit would play more Italian love songs, and he would sing them at the top of his voice. Anyone who heard him on the street outside thought they were listening to a professional singer. He had a way of singing pop songs in a classical manner. It seemed to cheer him up, and everyone else who heard them. As the music played he would think about forthcoming foreign adventures, and of course he would think about the good times he had had abroad with friends. The great thing about life he reckoned was that once you showed people you were on their side, they responded positively, and all alien feelings ceased and love got a chance to breakthrough again. Love was given to everyone, and everyone could love given the chance. It was the most natural thing in life to do. In fact, to hate was something alien to human beings. Hate was a block on love. The sun must always shine, and through love he knew that it was easy to meet people and become friends with them.

At breakfast, this morning he thought about the Two Tattooed Woman; she seemed to be from another planet. He laughed to himself when he remembered her coming into the café bar last week: "Ah wiz like that when he said he wanted to take me oot to a fancy restaurant."

He wondered what she was up to this morning, phoning up some friend no doubt shouting at them: "See me, I just get right into them; I don't mess aboot."

He knew she had been married. Her gentle heart had been broken, and for some reason she felt antagonistic towards others now. The unseen forces in life had made her react like this. They had made her bizarre. The antagonism she showed towards others was comical. "What you talking aboot!" and she would swear like a trouper at them. This was part of her make up now. "F this F that

Everyone was different in life, so live and let live. This was how the Man in the Blue Suit had been brought up. He went along with that, but the Man in the Blue Suit had a philosophy all of his own. He was happy. He let nothing trouble him: money, work or anything else for that matter. If people were up to no good so what, and when he felt down he would escape to a warmer climate and enjoy himself. He loved meeting women abroad. He loved making love with them, and yes he always kept in touch with them. Above all he enjoyed kissing. He kissed everyone he met. Women never forgot his kiss. He knew his lips were made for kissing.

People around him were always moaning about the weather, lack of money, lack of opportunities. Life was good for the Man in the Blue Suit. "Life is wonderful when love is the dominant chord in your heart and soul," he told all his friends.

The Man in the Blue Suit never worried about a thing. One young lady he knew, that he had met abroad, had now set herself up on line with a web cam. Sometimes, the Man in the Blue Suit would sign in and chat with her. His handle was Blueforyou. People who were chatting to her at the same time he noticed asked her the strangest questions. However, when she saw the handle Blueforyou appear on her computer screen she knew that love words were coming her way. Yes, when the Man in the Blue Suit had signed in online, she knew that he would soon be saying kind and sexy things to her.

He would always try and get in on the chat before midnight, UK time, for after that he knew she would be naked, unromantic and business like. He knew time was money for the web cam girls, and that her clients - cyber animals he called them - were lost inside their own illusions.

You could learn so much about life just by watching people. The world was so strange and secretive, yet people were extremely open. Many people wanted to share photos and videos with strangers they had never met before. They wanted to show off their private lives, and their private parts to others. They wanted to show people how they spent their time with lovers and friends. It was a far out world now, maybe it always had been that way - but it was still a fabulous world.

The modern philosophy in the air was that humans were always learning things, and when they were honest with themselves happiness was possible. Perfection was not of this world. There were days when you bumped into people that got in your way, and there were days when you bumped into strangers who wanted to share time and intimate thoughts with you. The Man in the Blue Suit watched out for the angry man in society; he knew disappointments made men – especially middle-aged men - philosophical and sometimes mean.

To the Man in the Blue Suit, all women were beautiful. In fact, he was always amazed at how pretty women were on the street as they passed him by. It was true to say that never a day went by without him being overcome in some sense of beauty. He could be thrilled just by the way a young lady put on eyeliner, or nail vanish, in a café bar or waiting area.

The Man in the Blue Suit, although well over fifty, was now going through another sexual revolution. It was due mainly to going abroad, and keeping a pace with society there that he had rejuvenated his passion for the weaker sex. People all over the world he felt were in the main open about their love lives. Due to the Internet they were well up-to-date with what was going on in bedrooms as far as Moscow and Tokyo. It was really quite something. Even teenage girls were starting businesses online; they were active

in the pursuit of sexual knowledge that would make them a living. Sex he knew was always at the forefront with the young generation; it certainly was on the go again. He had noticed that the great thing about sex was that every time men and women did it, sex seemed to reinvent itself, and at that point it became dominant again inside the individual.

Older people who had not had sex for years were now looking for pleasures they had forgotten about after watching others, their age, having sex. Sex was in front of you every day. It had become part of the normal every day grown up world. It always had been that way only now it was promoted on manmade devices. You could not avoid it. Who would want to avoid it? Certainly not the Man in the Blue Suit, he reckoned that sex was endless once it drifted into your consciousness; it seemed to take you far out beyond the planets. You became wonderful again. The Man in the Blue Suit loved to love.

He would have to take the small painting, *Time Shadow*, with him to the south of France. He knew a hotel there, not far from the section where people loved to sunbathe naked. He thought about the Two Tattooed Woman wandering along the beach with him naked, and he smiled to himself: "Now, there's a thing."

The Man in the Blue Suit loved going to beach parties. There was always someone to meet there. He loved it when the sparks started to fly. The characters were unbelievable that turned up for these events: doctors, lawyers, underaged students, unemployed tradesmen. They came mainly in twos and threes. He usually found a bar near the beach, and there he sat and listened to the summer grooves. He watched the people around him dance, chat, and interact with each other. The Man in the Blue Suit liked naked beaches. He loved the women there, but he never got naked himself. He was always sitting close by to pick up one of the beauties when they came to the café bar for a drink. As they took a cool drink of lemon, or wine, he would excite their passions. "*Vous faites a manger* madam?"

This time it would be different even though he would go to the same hotel as usual, and meet the same people. When he was

there he would keep a low profile. He would try and make contact with Olga. In the afternoon he would take in the sunshine, go to the beach, eat good food, and relax at night. Life was always interesting in the south of France. The climate where he came from was dark and dreary, even in the summer it was unpredictable. It was highly unusual to have any long sustained periods of sunshine. The majority of people usually felt down about the weather and would moan about it.

The Man in the Blue Suit filmed his adventures in the south of France, on the beach, and private parties, to remind him of good times. The beautiful girls were only too happy to oblige. As soon as the summer grooves got going with their hypnotic dance tunes, people would crowd around him and dance. Summer in the south of France was terrific. The light was beautiful, and the colours out of this world. When he went there the Man in the Blue Suit danced all night.

He would usually leave his hotel late at night and visit various night clubs. He loved breaking the ice with strangers. He loved it when the DJ got things going. He sometimes danced on his own; for there was always people around him dancing and making love. The bikini lovers were never far away. Life was something to be lived, and there was nowhere better than to spend time than on the Riviera, dancing, or on a beach somewhere on the south of France. Some people in the area wore no clothes at all; they went into their cars and supermarkets naked. They knew the areas where they could go, and the places where they could do their own thing. It was well-known that knee-creepers would appear, and crawl around the beaches and film them, but no one seemed to mind.

The Man in the Blue Suit smiled to himself when he thought about the last time he was there: "This time will be different though," he reminded himself.

That morning he got a call from Mr. Gromyko; he wanted to meet him again. He once more offered him a good price for the painting *Time Shadow*. In an upbeat tone, he said to him on the

phone. “Man in the Blue Suit, you know, you will not get another offer like that in your lifetime.”

“I hear what you are saying,” he answered him back. Then he thanked him, and told Mr. Gromyko that he would get back to him before the end of the week, “I am busy at the moment.”

Suddenly, the voice became rough on the other end of the phone. “This will be your final offer. There will be no more offers after that,” said the man from Moscow. Then in a strange voice, he added: “I always get what I want, you know,” there was a pause, then he hung up.

The Man in the Blue Suit had checked the painting on the Internet. The artist had sadly died in suspicious circumstances. He read that he was French, from Menton. He knew after reading the report of the artist that there was something funny about it all. And who was this man Mr Gromyko? He was an odd ball. He had a smooth way to him, yet he was rough. He remembered what he had said about the artist, and how he had said it to him in a droll voice: “You know he was found dead in a hotel room in suspicious circumstances - funny thing life – don’t you think.”

He also remembered the letter from Twiggy, and the words she had written to him: ‘Don’t sell the painting to anyone apart from Olga’. She had also told him in the letter to read up on the artist on the Internet, which he of course did. The artist name was Zebra; he had posted a video up on the Internet just before he had died. He talked about the painting, *Time Shadow*. He told the viewers in broken English: ‘Every thing given a name is covered by time, but nothing can escape time.’

That night the Man in the Blue Suit stared at the painting on the wall inside the gallery, and by chance he took it down and looked at the back of it, and there lo and behold in-between the masking tape and the canvas, he noticed there was a little SD card stuck there. He took it out at once, and went over to his computer. Two clicks revealed one folder with two files inside it: a Word Document that had names of special agents in it, and a movie file. The Man in the Blue Suit looked at the names of the agents, and then he watched the movie.

In the video there was a party going on, he could see that much, and the artist Zebra was there between two woman. The two women were both looking at him. It looked like a hotel they were in. There was no volume. Suddenly, there was a flash, and the artist fell to the ground. The women fled. The camera focused in on his face as he lay there on the floor of the hotel. He had been shot. Then a rough man's face bent down beside the dead body, and he took something from inside his jacket pocket, then the film went blank.

"What was that all about," wondered the Man in the Blue Suit.

He replaced the SD card inside the back of the painting and went to bed. He immediately forgot what he had just seen, like you do when you watch a film, or an episode of a television drama that you don't particularly like. And as he lay there in bed his mind drifted to other things. He wanted to travel. He wanted to run away from the boring world of convention around him.

The Man in the Blue Suit had detected misanthropy within society at an early age. He had no time for scandal, or tittle-tattle, or even intrigue. What had gossip to do with him? The worst thing in society was *le sentiment* as the French would say. Most people he came across spent their days talking down others. Suddenly, he came to his senses: "What should I do with the painting *Time Shadow*?"

He knew now that there was incriminating evidence in it: a list of agents' names on a little SD Card, hidden in the back of the painting, and then there was the video film of the artist being shot dead.

Why people hated each other in life was a mystery to him. It appeared to the Man in the Blue Suit that for whatever reason many people cared nothing for their fellow man, or woman, not even at the time they were acting kind to them - now that was strange. He knew that the essential thing in life was love, friendship followed on from that. However, in the modern world he could see that good things had been replaced with greed, hate, suspicion, fear, and anger. Take the conversation on the street he had just re-

cently heard. The Man in the Blue Suit had met the father of someone he once knew. During the conversation it became noticeable to him that everything the man said was directed to the world around him: "How much money are you making?"

The Man in the Blue Suit when he thought about that again laughed out loud: for he was asked that question a lot by his so called friends. Keeping in touch with friends by phone, letter, or message was wonderful when you were generally interested in the welfare of another, but it is fair to say that very few people contacted the Man in the Blue Suit with this in mind. So off he went on his travels to meet like-minded people who were interested in love and friendship. He knew that he would enjoy himself there on the Riviera, there he could dance and make love.

The Man in the Blue Suit was always involved in some kind of art project, and he had lunch most days with fellow art buyers or clients. Every room of his flat had every type of modern art in it; he loved abstract art. It is fair to say he lived a conventional life surrounded by unusual art.

When he came back from his constitutional walk that morning, he noticed that his flat door had been opened by someone. His flat could be entered via the close next to the salon, or from the salon itself. Whoever had broken in had managed not to trigger the alarm. Whoever it was had come in via the close entrance; it had been a professional tidy job. Thankfully, he had hid the painting behind a larger one in the gallery, and he was pleased to see that it was still there when he looked for it. The SD card was still inside it. The intruder had not found what he was looking for.

The telephone rang at that moment, and a familiar voice screamed down the phone at him. It was the unmistakable voice of the Two Tattooed Woman: "What are you up to Blue Man?"

Just at that moment, he thought up an idea, "Yes, that's what I will do; I will take her with me to the south of France for cover."

He knew that from now on, he must be sweet to her. This would be a new experience: "How are you, my dear?"

She detected the unusual tone in his voice: "What are you up to Blue Man? What's wrong with you this mornin - you been on the sauce last night?"

He laughed at the thought of it, and to cover his subterfuge, tongue in cheek, he replied: "Who me?

"Yea you!"

"I am practically teetotal, these days."

The Man in the Blue Suit knew from experience that it was always best to say what you were thinking, and not hold back: "Listen, I would like you to come with me to the south of France on a business trip. We have to leave tomorrow morning. Everything will be fully paid for. Is your passport in order?"

At first, the Two Tattooed Woman could not understand what she was hearing: "What you talking about, ya numpty!"

When he did not reply, she screamed: "Are you still drunk Blue Man, from last night?" I know, you've been out celebrating with your big shot pals again?"

"I will get the tickets, book the hotel - two separate beds," he added quickly and diplomatically," then to make sense of it all he added. "The business trip will last for about six days. We will be back here before the end of next week. I have to find a buyer, you see, for the painting *Time Shadow.* We have to meet someone over there called Olga."

It was at this point that she realised what he was saying was real, and that he meant it. The Man in the Blue Suit was a seasoned traveller, and he spoke accordingly: "We have to leave tomorrow early in the morning. Are you sure your passport is in order?" he asked her again.

"Of course it is, Blue Man; I'm just back from Majorca."

He was pleased about that, and immediately told her about the arrangements: "Good, then meet me at Central Station tomorrow at 7am."

"Ya cheapskate - you no flyin!"

"Oh, you will enjoy the French trains, it's a lovely experience.

"Aye right."

"Don't let me down now."

"I'll be there, don't you worry, Blue Man."

He had tea that afternoon in his favourite cafe bar, and as he sat there by the window he thought about his next trip abroad. Then he thought about some of the paintings he had bought just recently: the beautiful colours, and the abstract shapes within them. The Man in the Blue Suit soon drifted again to the wonderful world of the south of France via these colours. The colours in his memory seemed to come to him through these paintings, as if to rescue him from his drab surroundings. He had a good memory for sounds too. The Riviera had distinctive sounds, and he remembered them. The pulse, beats, and the rhythms of the Riviera were there inside him, and it was uncanny how he could remember them. The memory of the beach, and the people wandering along the coast looking for beauty spots made him happy.

However, the thing that made him most happy though was the colour of the blue sky above the turquoise sea. It seemed everywhere in his mind. It was endless. He knew that beauty whatever it was, was illuminated by the light. He looked out of the cafe bar window again into the gloomy surroundings of the grey Glasgow street, and he wondered to himself once more, "What am I doing living here?"

Outside on the street, he watched a man walk by the window of the café bar; he seemed to typify the city. The man stopped and stood in the doorway. He was small, and he wore dark clothes. He had probably never bought a colourful shirt or jacket in his life. On reflection, he had seen him before in some of the night clubs. He stood out not because of his appearance, but because he rarely bought a drink. He knew that he was acting for someone, a client, friend, or another, keeping him up-to-date with what was going on in the city: who was flashing the cash, who was pulling the women? The Mafia, or to be more exact their tactics, were everywhere.

He suddenly realised that this was his shadow. He had been hanging around him recently. The man had not put on his dark coat today, so he went and stood in the doorway, opposite the café bar to keep warm, and of course keep an eye on the Man in the

Blue Suit, who owned the gallery. As he looked over across at the recruitment agency this morning, he wondered if the man in the doorway there would tail him all the way to the south of France.

"Who is it that has commissioned him to follow me?" he wondered to himself, "And for what reason?"

The night before going abroad was always busy for the Man in the Blue Suit. This time he packed his clothes into a small tartan bag, and when he had finished he placed his video camera inside it, along with his small laptop. He could go online anytime and download some music tracks, and listen to them on the train. He could run his laptop from the battery for hours, but if there was a power source close by him, he could use that too.

He would usually take a film with him to watch on his handheld device, but most of all he loved to read and write on the train. His latest thing was to make music on his little computer when he travelled; he had bought a small keyboard to input the notes with. He knew that he could do that with the mouse too, but he preferred to do it with a keyboard. However, he would only do this when there was no one to talk too. The Two Tattooed Woman usually talked non stop, so he decided to leave the keyboard in his flat. Most of all the Man in the Blue Suit loved meeting fellow travellers. This was a great thing in life. People who were on their way somewhere were fascinating, and when he bumped into them he would always chat to them. People who were travelling were usually friendly.

The Man in the Blue Suit had met many women on his travels. They were always interested in him, as soon as he looked into their eyes, and they saw his blue eyes smiling at them. This trip would be different though this time. He lifted the tickets for the journey from his dresser, and he placed them in his wallet. He took some Euros out of his dinner suit jacket pocket, and picked a credit card, one that could handle the journey.

"Now where did I put the most important item of all?" he wondered to himself, as he looked around his flat. "Where did I leave it?"

When he thought about his last journey, he remembered where it was: "I know where I put the little travelling kettle - it is in the cabinet under the sink" and he went and got it, and placed it into his travelling bag.

The Man in the Blue Suit made up some food before going to bed, and he placed it in a carrier bag ready for the morning to take with him. Even though this trip would be different he was looking forward to it. He thought about the Two Tattooed Woman getting ready for the voyage.

When the Man in the Blue Suit was in Central Station he often looked down onto the tracks before the train moved off. He knew these tracks would take him south to the warm weather, and the beautiful women there. Nothing dampened his enthusiasm travelling to the south of France. Yes, he was excited. The Man in the Blue Suit loved travelling. He sometimes felt lethargic when he returned home after a trip abroad, but after a few days he was ready to travel again. He loved travelling at night too, lying in a couchette watching the world fly by outside his train window. It was wonderful going from place to place between countries.

He wondered if he would be followed throughout Europe this time due to the painting, *Time Shadow*, that had now come into his possession. Someone somewhere was no doubt in a panic over the exposure of the agents' names inside the file in the SD card, that had for some reason been placed inside the back of the painting. He felt that they would try and intercept him and recover it. He would have to watch himself. He would go to the south of France to the hotel he knew, and there wait for a call from Olga. He would hopefully meet his connection, and sell the painting to her. He owed that much to Twiggy to see that it was sold to the right buyer.

In the morning, he put the painting carefully in his suitcase. The painting, *Time Shadow*, was quite small; he packed it carefully in bubble rap, then placed it in the bottom of his red tartan bag, inside a hidden compartment. He knew the SD card was inside it, and the video along with the report of agents acting on behalf of

someone. He knew this information was very important, and of interest to some agent out there.

5

Very early in the morning he locked his flat and salon, then he headed for the station to meet the Two Tattooed Woman. As he walked to the station, he went over the arrangements in his mind. The letter that he had destroyed said that when he got to Cote d'Azur there would be a contact to meet in the south of France. In Nice, he knew there would be a woman named Olga there waiting for him when he got to his hotel. To make sure that he met the right person he was to ask her the question: "What is Moscow like these days? and the answer she would give him was: "Oh, you can buy an elephant there if you want to."

However, he knew he would have to avoid the Russian agents. They would be watching his every move from now on. The Man in the Blue Suit reckoned that they had recruited the local gangster's agent to follow him round his own city. He knew the man was always standing in the doorway opposite his salon watching his every move. He called him the Slouch.

The Man in the Blue Suit had travelled this way many times before. His most popular journey was to catch the first train in the morning from London to Nice. He usually travelled to London the night before. He would wait in the coffee shop at St Pancras until the international gates opened around 5 am, and then catch the

first train to Paris. He would cross over to Gard de Nord, and from there board the TGV south to the Riviera. Fellow travellers, going or coming from the continent, were unusually friendly. It was quite cosy too sitting there in the coffee shop talking to travellers until the morning. The police walked through the large international station to keep an eye on things. In fact, one time when he arrived at the station he met a woman who had locked herself out of her London flat, and she was waiting there until the morning to chap up her neighbour. "I couldn't' just ring him up at this hour; they will be in bed by now," she had told him.

When the Man in the Blue Suit arrived at Central Station early that morning, he walked into the empty concourse, put his tartan bag down, just near the ticket office, and waited for the Two Tattooed Woman to arrive. Very few people were about at this hour. He of course heard her before he saw her: "I'm telling you those taxi drivers are unreal. You know he wanted my phone number, as well as a tip. I told him where to go - chancer."

The Man in the Blue Suit smiled at her. Then to set the tone for the trip, he said in a business manner to her: "Good morning, nice to see you - you are looking well."

He only had brought a small tartan bag with him, so it was easy for him to lift her large pink trolley case and drag it along with him.

"Travelling light, Blue Man," she said to him in a mocking tone, as she looked down at his bag.

He smiled as they walked on and, in a friendly voice, he said rather modestly: "Right, let's grab a coffee over here, before we head south to the Riviera."

"I hope there not all as stuck up the way they are here," she replied, as she looked around her at the empty station.

He noticed as they walked towards the coffee shop that she was dressed up quite nice, in a summer coat and skirt. He had not seen her like that before. He felt like crying: for he could tell she was trying her best to please him. The Man in the Blue Suit was very sensitive towards others. He had been like that since he was a boy. When things were genuine, he felt them. The way he looked

at the world was like a child, simple images seemed to race into his heart. He liked that. In fact, he still had a boy's spirit inside him. He knew that the man in him was a character; he knew his part and played it well. The Man in the Blue Suit of course had learned many things in life, especially how to understand the opposite sex. However, from an early age, he realized that only a child's spirit was worth keeping right throughout your life, and moreover it was the one that had the most fun attached to it.

"Would you like a coffee, or a cup of tea?" he asked her, as they approached the coffee outlet at the far end of the station.

"That would be nice," she said suspiciously.

The Two Tattooed Woman never refused anything, In fact, he had heard a rumour that she said 'yes' to every thing. "Coffee for me Blue Man."

When they moved inside the coffee shop, he noticed two people sitting there, both had their backs to them. It was early and everything seemed cold and clinical. The station had yet to come alive with travellers, their endless chatter and mysterious faces. Just then a man sat down near him; he sat next to the glass window that looked back out into the station. Right away he opened up his morning newspaper. Even from the back the Man in the Blue Suit recognised this figure. It was his shadow: the Slouch.

The Two Tattooed Woman was not a bad sport and, as soon as the train left the station, she brought out of box of chocolates that she had brought along for the journey. The Man in the Blue Suit loved chocolates, "Oh you shouldn't have!" he exclaimed, as he put away his mobile reading device. Right away, he delved into the box exclaiming: "I know my favourite one when I see it."

The Man in the Blue Suit surveyed the selection card with gusto. The illustrated card inside showed all the different types of chocolates he could have. The illustration was familiar to him. It had hardly changed since he was a boy. The Man in the Blue Suit knew the one he wanted: for his love of chocolates stemmed from his mother. He could almost see her sitting there beside him on the train taking one out of the box - the strawberry one of course - and saying to herself: 'Delicious,' as she put it in her mouth.

Not long after this, he noticed his shadow the Slouch, coming through the carriage pretending to look for someone as he made his way to the restaurant car. The Man in the Blue Suit watched him closely. He wondered what his voice sounded like: for he had never heard him speak. Was he really going to follow him all the way to the south of France? He certainly wasn't dressed for the weather: for he was still dressed in his Crombie coat, baseball cap, and leather boots. This was certainly not the attire for the Riviera in late June.

He wondered if he should go and grab a coffee and check out his shadow: for that was where he was surely heading. He knew the restaurant car was the next carriage along. The Two Tattooed Woman was now rather dangerous: for he had noticed that she was starting to look at him as if he was her partner. To think about them as couple well that was something else. "Would you like another coffee?" he asked her as he got up to go to the restaurant car.

"No I'm fine thanks," she said in a dreamy tone, as she looked out of the window at the disappearing city behind her: "I think I will have a wee doze now."

Walking through fast trains was always good fun for the Man in the Blue Suit. He loved looking at the faces of his fellow travellers, as he walked by them: "You never know whose lap you will end up on," he joked to himself.

As it happened, as the train hurtled through Motherwell, the Man in the Blue Suit found himself on top of a fat middle aged woman who was dressed in a black office suit. "Oh, terribly sorry, madam," he said as he climbed off her.

He could hear some of the passengers laughing at him as he steadied himself in the isle. The fat woman with the white hair however did not laugh; she rolled up her Daily Mail morning paper, and started hitting him with it. "Get off me you imbecile."

The Man in the Blue Suit moved away quickly, and smiled at a passenger coming towards him along the isle, "That was a close shave."

As he walked away from him, he could see the end of the carriage, and that his shadow was standing there in the little group

of people waiting to buy something to eat or drink. Small crowds of people fascinated the Man in the Blue Suit, invariably there was always someone speaking to someone, and there was always someone listening in, and there was always someone looking in one direction while others were looking away in another.

"Where is he now?" he wondered, for as he got closer to the dinning car he lost sight of him.

The Man in the Blue Suit joined the little group waiting to be served; he was pleased to see a young lady there in front of him on her own. Travellers were usually friendly so, as soon as he joined the little group inside the restaurant car, the Man in the Blue Suit spoke to her, "I hope they don't run out of whisky by the time I get served."

She laughed and this gave him time to scan again the little group standing beside him to see where the man had got to. He was nowhere to be seen. There was only one place the Slouch could be and that was standing at the other side of the buffet car in the passageway, before the first class carriages.

The Man in the Blue Suit when he got to the front of the queue popped his head round the corner, and there he caught sight of the man's image in the window, as the train flashed through another long noisy tunnel. He could see him quite clearly standing there in the passageway just before the first class compartment. The woman that he had met in the queue must have liked his joke about running out of whisky: for when she turned to go back to her seat with her coffee and cake in her hand, she smiled at him, and he noticed she waggled her bottom as she passed him.

Up until that point, he hadn't noticed how skimpily she was dressed, and what a good figure she had too. She had on a cotton dress and nothing much below it. When he caught site of her swaying breasts, he smiled to himself.

The moment she had gone his shadow appeared again, but this time he got a good look at him. However, as they went through another long tunnel he disappeared back from where he had come from.

The Man in the Blue Suit bought some crisps and soft drinks, and then headed back to his seat. He had left his tartan bag with the painting, *Time Shadow*, in it with the Two Tattooed Woman. No one in their right mind would try and take it off her. As fate would have it, halfway through the first carriage on his way back to his seat he was hauled down by his tie onto a vacant seat by the woman he had met in the queue inside the buffet car.

Hello my dear?" she said in a very sexy voice.

"Where are you heading?"

As the Man in the Blue Suit got comfortable in the seat beside her he smiled. The woman laughed at him. "I bought this for you," she said, and she twisted open a miniature of whisky for him to drink. "Have a little whisky with me, and tell me where you going to," she said to him with a gorgeous smile.

"Oh the Riviera, my dear" he said looking at her attractive face.

She then produced a plastic glass for him and, as she emptied the miniature into it, she introduced herself: "My name is Donna."

He replied with a twinkle in his eye: "They call me the Man in the Blue Suit.

"Very nice to meet you," said Donna."

The whisky was nice too, and as he looked down again at her two suntanned breasts, now clearly visible to him, suddenly a voice above him screamed. "Right, what are you up to Blue Man?" It was the unmistakable voice of the Two Tattooed Woman. "I can't leave you alone for a minute" she said laughing: "And you're off chasing the women."

The Man in the Blue Suit got up like a shot. "Yes, I was just telling, Donna here about our trip."

The Two Tattooed woman smiled at her: "Oh, Donna is it, please to meet you Donna."

Donna looked at the Two Tattooed Woman. Then she put her hand out towards her, and as she did so she turned to the Man in the Blue Suit, and said to him: "You never told me about your interesting companion."

As they went back to their seats the Man in the Blue Suit tried to explain the situation: "She thought she knew me, you know, from somewhere that woman. I tell you I was glad you came along when you did: for I was beginning to think I would never get away."

The Two Tattooed Woman made a face at him. She was just about to say something crude. However, as they approached theirs seats in the middle of the carriage, out of the corner of her eye she spotted the Slouch. She had not set eyes on him before, but when she saw him trying to open the tartan bag that the Man in the Blue Suit had placed above their seats, she was over at him like a shot. She went right up to him and grabbed him by the collar, and dragged him towards the end of the carriage. "What are you doing looking in there, ya numpty?"

The Man in the Blue Suit hadn't really noticed what was going on until he heard the Slouch squealing. In a terrified voice, he protested: "Oh I'm sorry; I thought that was my bag."

"Aye likely story, ya wee creep," and as the Two Tattooed Woman faced him down, she warned him: "If I see you again doing that you will get this! You hear me!" and she waved her fist at him.

The Slouch was glad to get free, and he soon hurried away. There was silence in the carriage, then laughter could be heard. The people sitting in coach C, could see that the man on his way out of the carriage was trembling. Who wouldn't be after an encounter with the Two Tattooed Woman?

Realising what had happened the Man in the Blue Suit reassured himself, "She has her good points, you know; I am pleased I brought her along," and as he laughed out loud with the others in the carriage he sat down at the window seat.

"It's no laughing matter," she told him. "If that galoot comes anywhere near our bags again, I'll give him the Glasgow kiss," she promised herself.

It was a quiet journey after this until they reached Newcastle where upon about twenty Jewish students came into carriage C, dressed in their full regalia. They all sat down near the Man in the

Blue Suit. Presently, they started talking to him about religion. The Man in the Blue Suit enjoyed talking to them. The Two Tattooed Woman looked on. She had a strange happy look on her face as she listened into the discussion. The thing that hit the Man in the Blue Suit was that the Jewish lads believed they alone had the essential knowledge to access the words in the Bible. Only one of the students had read the New Testament, and he seemed more aware of life outside the Torah; he was more sympathetic.

The Man in the Blue Suit told them where he was going, and something about the history of the journey, travelling from the north to the south of Europe. He had read all about the old Blue train on the Internet: "The Blue Train used to travel from Paris to the south of France in the old days. It carried the rich and poor to the Riviera. It must have been a real life adventure travelling together for such a long time, don't you think? he openly wondered.

The Two Tattooed Women, as they sat together on the train got her tuppence worth in: "Yea, a real life adventure Blue Man," she said, as she bit into a sandwich.

He smiled at her for could really imagine himself walking along the platform in his Blue Suit, meeting the guard of the blue train and smiling at him. Yes, somewhere in the past just after the Second World War, he could see himself quite clearly sitting there, dressed in his famous Blue Suit, in a small compartment with others travelling to the south of France: "Time is invisible," a strange voice whispered to him.

Wondering what he was talking about, The Two Tattooed Woman turned to him and ejaculated in a loud voice, "What are you on aboot? Is this the train going to the Riviera?"

He smiled at her: "No, we must change in London to do that."

Then he whispered to her: "We will soon be in the south of France, and there we will make contact with the buyer Olga." He could not help but wonder about the man on the train though. "Who is he?" he kept asking himself, "Is he connected to Olga, or to that mysterious man Mr Gromyko?"

He had first noticed the Slouch when he came out of his office in town a few days ago. He had met many clients over the years, but he had never been followed before. The Man in the Blue Suit wondered what the man would do now that his cover was broken. Would he be replaced in London when they got there? They did not see him again on the journey.

The train got into London on time, and they walked the short distance to St Pancras Station to catch the train to Paris. They had over an hour to spare, so there was plenty of time for another coffee before they boarded the Eurostar train. The Italian coffee shop opposite the gate for European travellers was always open; he knew they served good coffee there.

The Two Tattooed Woman, as she sat down inside the coffee shop at St Pancras, looked content as if she knew the rest of the journey would be bliss, "Right, let's see the tickets Blue Man?" she said laughing.

The Man in the Blue Suit gladly handed them over to her, "There you are, you keep hold of them." He also gave her 50 euros, in tens and twenties, "for expenses, "For more coffees and cakes, and things like that," he said in a business manner, as he handed the money over to her.

The Two Tattooed Woman snapped the notes out of his hand: "Right, Blue Man, I'll take care of things from now on - don't you worry about that."

In no time at all, she went up to the counter and bought them coffee and croissants. After he took his first sip of coffee, he became aware of a child playing happily with her mother at the next table. They were quite charming. It was lovely to see how the young girl could dismiss the unbelievable mundane world around her; for it was only of interest to her when she wanted it to be. Her mother, however, seemed completely overwhelmed by it, and she stared out at the station, at the travellers, then into her coffee cup, as if the answer to her problems lay somewhere between the two.

The Two Tattooed Woman had put her pink trolley case under the table and, after finishing her coffee and croissant, she

opened it up. "Now, where did I put my hairbrush?" she said with a quizzical look on her face.

This was a pretence: for inadvertently she opened her case and showed the Man in the Blue Suit all her sexy lingerie that she had brought along with her. This made him almost turn white when he saw it. He was now in a slight panic: "What if she tries it on in the middle of the night, somewhere in the south of France," he wondered.

She was bitter sweet, mostly bitter, but he had caught glimpses of her tender side. However, he could not imagine making love to her. She would get angry and would tell him what to do. However, she was good cover from the agents who would be no doubt be following him when they got to the Riviera. He knew they would be trying to intercept him before he sold the painting *Time Shadow* to Olga.

After coffee they walked towards the Euro gate: "So this is where you get the fancy train, Blue Man" said the Two Tattooed Woman, swaggering along beside him.

The Man in the Blue Suit nodded, and clutched his tartan carrier bag tight. He knew he had packed the painting, *Time Shadow*, inside it. Like an experienced traveller, he pointed the way: "Yes, this is the way, my dear, the next time you get off the train you will be in France."

The Man in the Blue Suit was glad everything had gone smoothly so far. They had to make three connections, to get to the south of France. This was the start of the international journey. They were now on their way to mainland Europe. In plenty of time, they boarded the Eurostar train, upstairs at St Pancras station. The Man in the Blue Suit not long after sitting down in his comfortable seat fell fast asleep. He loved sleeping on trains. When he woke up he noticed they were just about to enter the Channel tunnel. Having done this journey many times before, he lay back and fell fast asleep again; this time he fell into a cloudy dream.

"I'm freezing; I think I will just slip into your nice warm bed beside you."

The Two Tattooed Woman crawled under the sheets towards him. She had that mad look in her eyes. He tried to get out of bed, on the other side - but his bed was next to the wall. He turned and looked towards her, and then looked out of the hotel window. He could see that the beach was busy; it was late afternoon and it was awash with beautiful women. The Two Tattooed Woman took her bra off. She pointed her two small breasts over his face, then rubbed them into his mouth. He felt warm as if he had a fever, his throat was dry.

"You want a wee sweetie?"

"What's that?"

He looked round at the Two Tattooed Woman: "You've been dreaming, ya numpty. Here take one of these."

"Yea, your right - it was some dream," he said, as he took the éclair from her.

It all came back to him, he was on the Eurostar train heading for France with the cleaner from his salon: the Two Tattooed Woman. He was to sell a painting *Time Shadow* to a foreign buyer. He remembered the plan: he had to meet Olga in the south of France, sell the painting to her and return home. The Man in the Blue Suit calmed down.

"What's wrong with you?" she squealed, "You look as if you are about to meet your death."

"You are not far wrong there," he muttered under his breath.

"A fate worst than death," he added, as he looked over at the adjoining passengers.

He noticed that the two men there were dressed in army uniforms opposite him. The uniforms were not real army uniforms. The Man in the Blue Suit could tell this: for as a boy he had loved soldiers and collected models of them. The two men quickly looked away.

He was relieved that he was on the train, and once more he fell fast asleep. Strangely enough, he fell into another dream. This time he found himself in a well-furnished room sitting in a wicker basket chair. In the room there were all his former girlfriends dressed in either beach ware or lingerie. There were girls there

from high school, as well as others he had forgotten about from the city bars where he frequented. They were some beautiful foreign women there too from countries that he had visited. However, the strange thing was that they were all ignoring him. They were drinking cocktails and talking to each other. He could see that they had made friends with each other, which was strange. Suddenly, he caught sight of a woman in a pink bathing costume coming towards him: "Gosh it's the Two Tattooed Woman," he said getting up off his chair. She was coming towards him at a rate of knots, as if wishing to devour him. He woke up in a sweat again.

The Two Tattooed Woman sitting next to him yelped: "What's wrong with you!" and for good measure she nudged him in the ribs.

He looked out of the train window and saw the train coming out of the tunnel: "Oh, it nothing, just another strange dream," he said. "It will not be long until we are in Paris now," he said looking back at the Two Tattooed Woman. And for something to say he added. "And from there we have to take the French TGV train to Nice. It is a lovely modern train, you know. I was lucky; I managed to get first class tickets. I booked them on line."

The train left from Gare de Lyon on time for the south of France, and there in the comfortable first class seats, the two of them sat next to each other once again. This time the Man in the Blue Suit brought out his small computer, and started reading up on business reports about paintings, and what they had been sold for. The Two Tattooed Woman stared around her, and she soon found herself chatting to a woman slightly older than her from Germany, sitting over the isle on her left hand side.

"Superb," thought the Man in the Blue Suit, as he clicked open another page on his computer.

Listening to her pretending that she was an international traveller was something else. "Oh yes, we deal a lot with foreign buyers, you know" she said to the woman in a funny posh voice.

The German woman was educated, and when the time was right she smiled and told the Two Tattooed Woman: "That's interesting, I work as an executive consultant for a large International

bank, and our section deals with payments, mainly involving international art markets."

"Oh, we are in the arts too," echoed the Two Tattooed Woman.

The German woman took out a copy of *Le Monde*, sniffed, and then said: "Yes, I have always thought that the art market is a very interesting sector."

"My partner and I, are going to sell a painting to some Russian dude, in the South of France," added the Two Tattooed Woman in her usual voice.

"My Partner and I!" the words seemed to echo in his mind and never stop. In fact, the 'partner' word sent a tremor through him. The Man in the Blue Suit bent forward and tried to smile at the German woman, but he noticed he couldn't.

Just then, an angry woman came along the passageway to complain about the noise of the Two Tattooed Women. This woman was middle-aged, middle class, anorexic, and had her hair up in a bun. She looked like she was the type who was never away from the doctor. In a broken English accent, she said in a terse foreign voice: "Excuse me madam, this is a Zen carriage."

The Man in the Blue Suit had travelled many times on this train to the Riviera, and he understood that this was a quiet coach; they called it a Zen carriage. He hadn't realized this though when he had booked the tickets on line. Anyway, it was great news: for you were not meant to talk too much, or use your mobile phone. He could get back to work on his laptop now.

"What are you all aboot!" squealed the Two Tattooed Woman, who stood up and confronted her.

The woman had never seen, or heard anyone speak like this to her before, or indeed had been confronted by such an angry face before in life. She immediately went white. The woman was so shocked her tone changed immediately. She said in a childlike voice: "This is a Zen carriage, we are not meant to make much of a noise in here."

"I don't care if it's the Orient Express; I was just having a chat here with my friend from Germany, so you can go and…"

The Man in the Blue Suit stood up right away and interjected: "Yes, it was just a friendly chat they were having. We are all tired so I'm sure we will be sleeping soon, so don't worry about it."

The woman did not know how lucky she had been: for the Man in the Blue Suit had saved her from every known fowl, and abusive word in the English language, or at least in the vocabulary of the Two Tattooed Woman. He knew that no one was ever the same after a face to face encounter with the Two Tattooed Woman.

The anorexic woman. with her hair tied up in a bun, quickly turned round and went back to her seat somewhere at the back of the carriage.

"What's she all aboot!"

At this point, the Two Tattooed Woman turned round to the German woman beside her, and introduced her to her own personal philosophy: "See me, I don't stand for that kind of nonsense," then she delivered her favourite saying: "I get right into them; I don't mess aboot!"

The Man in the Blue Suit smiled over at the German business woman; he knew that no more English words were necessary. The frightening world reported every day in daily newspapers, on radio, and on TV, was something worth avoiding. The Man in the Blue Suit had come to this conclusion many years ago. He did not buy newspapers, watch TV, or listen to the radio anymore. The news was always depressing. He caught headlines here and there on his computer, or mobile device, and that was enough for him. However, the Two Tattooed Woman gobbled up the stuff: "Look a man killed trying to sell impressionist paintings, murdered on the street," she said to him, as she opened the arts page of the paper she had bought in London.

The Man in the Blue Suit glanced at the picture of the body in the street. He could see that the report was about a man who had been shot outside a night club somewhere in South America. The heading read: Art Dealer Killed by the Mob.

"Thanks for drawing my attention to that," said the Man in the Blue Suit. "Business can sometimes be dangerous, you know," he said with a wink, looking over at the German woman.

"Look here's another one," and she showed it to him. The heading read: 'Artist kidnapped by his manager in Seoul.'

"You better watch yourself, Blue Man; there are people out there who don't like artists, and the people they deal with."

The German business woman looked across the isle at the Man in the Blue Suit. He smiled back at her and, as he bent his head forward, he added with a wink: "Yes, I had better watch out."

This was light stuff as far as the Two Tattooed Woman was concerned. She loved relating newspaper events regarding strange men and women who had committed unspeakable acts and deeds against society. The gory details were always retold by her in such a passionate way too.

However, she did not seem her usual self today, even after confronting the white faced anorexic woman on the train. She seemed rather content. Retribution seemed to have been replaced by tittle-tattle. She seemed at ease as an international traveller, and was enjoying the train ride to the south of France. Sometimes she got up off her seat, and wandered along the carriage, then she would come back again smiling at the people in the first class compartment as she passed by them.

"See me, the next time I am coming I'm booking first class in a normal carriage." she said as she sat back down beside him. "Zen Carriages are for robots."

The Man in the Blue Suit had some luck with the booking; he had grabbed the offer on the internet as soon as he saw it. It was a special price. To keep on her right side, he told her about this: "You will be pleased to know that I managed to get a first class berth of the way back too."

The ladies sitting in front of them were very charming; they were all from Paris, on their way to Cannes. They offered fellow travellers crisps, fruit and sweets as the train headed south towards

the Riviera: “We love dancing,” said one elegantly middle-aged woman named Guinevere.

The Man in the Blue Suit spoke to them in French, for none of them spoke much English. They were all dressed up as if they were travelling back to the 1960’s, with large fashionable hats and flowery outfits. The Two Tattooed Woman was fascinated by them, and she asked them many questions: “So what kind of songs do you dance to then?”

Lucky for her the young woman behind her could interpret the finer points of their musical style, and this saved the Man in the Blue Suit from getting too deeply involved. It was 1960’s traditional French songs they said they liked. “We love the old romantic style,” said one of the charming ladies, suddenly finding her English voice.

It soon became apparent their favourite resort was Cannes. “We go there at this time of year to dance. It’s such good fun. We meet up with friends when we are there,” reported Guinevere.

They were a nice happy bunch, friendly and kind, and they were polite and civil in their actions towards others. The Two Tattooed Woman appreciated this, and at times smiled at them. Even though they could not understand a word of what the Two Tattooed Woman was saying to them she persisted. She told them: “Aye me and my pals, we all go up the dancin at the weekend too, you know.”

6

The Man in the Blue Suit was slightly on edge as they arrived at the Hotel Reserve. It was not an expensive hotel, but a small friendly one. He had stayed there many times before, and he knew the owner. It was plain to everyone who entered this establishment that the owner had a very keen interest in Henri Matisse. All the rooms were decorated with his paintings. When they got to the check in desk, they were met by the man himself who owned the establishment: Mr Fournier. He of course knew it was the Man in the Blue Suit from a distance, just by his suit. When he approached him he greeted him warmly like an old friend: "How are you sir?"

"Ah Mr Fournier, good to see you again," replied the Man in the Blue Suit?"

After he had checked their names off the computer he introduced himself to the woman beside the Man in the Blue Suit. Mr Fournier put out his hand towards the Two Tattooed Woman. She took it, gripped it tight, then she shook it: "Aye right good to meet you mate." Then she asked him "What's the breakfast like in here?"

Mr Fournier before answering her asked for her passport. He looked at the Man in the Blue Suit, and smiled at him again, then

he said in broken English: "Well, madam we have croissants, cereal, tea, coffee, and some fruit juice, every morning," Then he pointed opposite to where he was standing, and said: "This is the room where we have breakfast, every morning 6.30 to 10am"

"What no bacon and eggs!" exclaimed the Two Tattooed Woman, and she immediately turned to the Man in the Blue Suit beside her: "What kind of place is this?"

Mr Fournier smiled at her: for he had met many different types of women from all over the world in his hotel, but he had to admit to himself he had never met anyone quite like the Two Tattooed Woman before.

"Oh, before I forget monsieur, there is a letter for you here," and he retrieved it from a pigeon hole above the computer.

After he had signed the register, the Man in the Blue Suit opened the letter. The handwriting was small and tidy: *Meet me at the cafe bar Monza in Monaco, near the front tomorrow at 2pm. Olga.*

That night they strolled around Nice, until the Man in the Blue Suit spotted on a blackboard outside a bar information telling him that his favourite football team were playing a European tie, and it was on live inside the cafe bar. It soon became obvious the Two Tattooed Woman liked football too. She didn't much care who was playing, she just cheered on the underdog.

As soon as the game started the Two Tattooed Woman started picking on some of the players. She started shouting things at the screen: "Oh, he's a waste of space. How much does he get paid to do that? It's ridiculous! He can't even kick a ball." However, the best one was left to last. When a player in the team that the Man in the Blue Suit supported misplaced a pass to a team mate that would have surely brought about a goal, she shouted out loud: "See him, he couldnae pass his water."

The foreigners in the bar, a small group of tourists and locals, were amazed at the passion coming from the woman beside the Man in the Blue Suit. They had never seen anything like this before. The match ended in a draw, and after they had finished their drinks they went to a restaurant nearby the hotel, and there they had a lovely meal, and a bottle of Rosè wine.

When they got back to the hotel the Man in the Blue Suit went straight to bed. When he saw the Two Tattooed woman getting undressed he watched her for a time, then he started to think about how he should approach the meeting with Olga tomorrow. The meeting was arranged for 2pm; he knew they had to be there on time.

It was a misty morning, but the forecast for the south of France was good. They would travel after breakfast to Monaco and meet Olga from Russia, at the appropriate place at the appointed time. The instructions were for him to go to a well-known Café at the front of the town.

The Man in the Blue suit loved travelling; he was up early and he made breakfast for both of them. "Breakfast madam," he said in a French accent. "The specialty of the house: muesli with milk, one boiled egg and some cracker bread.

The Two Tattooed Woman, although half asleep, was very impressed. She sat up in bed, and as she looked at the tray in front of her she yawned: "How did you manage to do that Blue Man?"

As he poured the hot water from the travelling kettle in to her cup, he smiled at her: "I once met a woman in Barcelona, a few years ago, and she told me that she boiled eggs in her travelling kettle. What a wonderful idea I thought to myself, I must try it."

"You're a bobby dazzler, Blue Man."

The crackerbread had been purchased in London at Marks and Spencer, along with the biscuits and cheese. He was keeping the latter for this evening.

"That was lovely," she said after finishing her tea.

"Now, I need to get up and get ready," and she sprang out of bed naked.

The Man in the Blue suit thought it a good idea to go and chat with Mr Fournier at reception. They would be meeting Olga today at lunchtime; he wanted to know if there were any budget places for them to go in Monaco where they could have something to eat. He knew Mr Fournier would know.

Having been in Nice many times before he knew the bus was the best way to travel there; it was cheap and the scenery en route was out of this world.

About an hour later they left the Hotel Reserve. The Man in the Blue Suit could see as they walked along that many people were waiting for the tram to take them through the city. In the crowd, the Man in the Blue Suit caught sight of a strange figure in white trousers and a black leather jacket. He was no stranger anymore to the Man in the Blue Suit. It was the Slouch. He had made it over to the Riviera and had changed his clothes. The Man in the Blue Suit almost wanted to go over and shake his hand and congratulate him. He wondered where he was staying.

The Two Tattooed Woman spotted him too: "What's that creep doing here? You know him; he is always hangin around that fancy bar in town the one that you go to."

He thought it best to keep his thoughts to himself, and he did not alert the Two Tattooed Woman as to the fact that the Slouch was now employed by the people trying to steal the painting *Time Shadow* from him. Anyway, he was distracted for he had noticed that the Two Tattooed Woman had put on white trousers too, and a pink T shirt. The words on the front of it read: What are you looking at? That was so funny: for it was something that he thought she would say to someone on the street who was looking at her. She had chosen to put on dark leopard spotted sunglasses, and he could see that she wore no bra or panties. The Man in the Blue Suit noticed all of this in a twinkling of an eye. He said nothing, but it made him smile.

"How often do the buses run?" she asked him, as they walked pass the people waiting for the tram.

"Oh, they are pretty frequent," he said keeping an eye on the man he called the Slouch, who was now following them. "Every half an hour, I think."

The bus left not far from the hotel and it was indeed cheap: one Euro per adult. And after he had paid the driver the money they sat in the middle of the bus, just beyond the small standing area. The Two Tattooed Woman of course grabbed the window

seat right away: “This will do me nicely,” she said to herself, as she sat down.

The last man on the bus was the Slouch; he had no problem getting on without declaring his destination. The driver just looked at him and said: “Monaco?” and the passenger nodded.

He sat near the front next to a fat African woman who was carrying a large baby in her arms. Even though the baby cried all the time, the Slouch did not react. It was as if he was oblivious to it; for he just kept looking straight ahead of him.

The scenery indeed was fantastic, and as the bus made its way along the coastal road it just seemed to get more interesting and beautiful. Every time the blue sea of the Mediterranean appeared out of the right-hand window of the bus, everyone would stretch their heads and look over at it. The passengers were so delighted, and surprised; it was as if they were seeing something from another planet. Some of the English speaking people commented about it.

“Look how beautiful it is!”

“Spectacular.”

“Out of this world.”

So, they had to meet the Russian agent down at the front at the café at 2 pm. It was still early yet. The Man in the Blue Suit had been many times to Monaco, and he knew the bus would stop not far from the famous casino, and from there they could descend down to where all the boats were situated at the harbour.

No matter from what country they were from, the tourists marvelled at the principality. The rich people going here and there dressed in expensive clothes. The luxury sports cars seemed to be everywhere, passing them by on the street, or just parked outside some of the expensive shops or restaurants. The lack of vulgar and downtrodden people that inhabited every other city in the world were nowhere to be seen. This was the domain of the rich. You could tell they were rich by how sad and worried they looked; for they had a lot to lose in terms of their finance.

The Man in the Blue Suit enlightened his companion: “They say that everyone who lives in Monaco is a millionaire. Day trip-

pers from all over the world come here just to see how the other half live, you know, and many dream that one day they will come back and live here and become like them."

Yes, it seemed to the outsider a paradise: beautiful yachts in the harbour, clean streets, fancy hotels, beautiful gardens, lovely buildings, and interesting highways that could take you to interesting places along the coast. Monaco was serviced by people who did not live there, every day the workers travelled to the principality to serve the rich, and at night they left and went home. This made the city even stranger.

As soon as she stepped off the bus, the Two Tattooed Woman said: "Here this is some place, is it no Blue Man."

The Man in the Blue Suit smiled and nodded at her. "Yes, this is where you come and live when you have won the lottery."

They found the cafe down at the front; it was the first one they came across, and there they ordered coffee and sat down outside opposite some expensive boats.

The Man in the Blue Suit looked at his watch. He knew that they had arranged to meet Olga at 2pm. It was five to two on his Timex watch when they got there.

The cafe worker who came out to serve them was friendly: "We had a boat fair here last week, you know, and the cheapest boat went for 2 million Euros."

"Did you buy it?" asked the Man in the Blue Suit.

The man laughed and looked at the Two Tattooed Woman. He was about to say something to her, but he could see that she was so overcome by the expensive boats in the harbour that she had forgotten all about where she was. She started talking openly about the people walking by in front of her: "Look at the style of him; I bet he's got wads in the bank."

Certainly, the middle-aged man she was referring to had a rich complexion; he wore a white suit and blue fedora hat. Just then he looked over at her from the direction of the harbour, then he smiled to himself. Never one to miss a trick the Two Tattooed Woman stared at him and, as if replying to an invitation, she shouted over to him: "Aye in your dreams."

The Man in the Blue Suit was enjoying himself looking at the world through his sunglasses too. However, he had not kept an eye out for Olga: for he was having such fun with his companion the Two Tattooed Woman. Out of the shadows, a Russian man approached them from the direction of the pier. When he approached their table he said in a short polite foreign voice: "Hello my name is Olga; I have come to buy the painting, *Time Shadow*, from you."

The Man in the Blue Suit was surprised to see that it was a man who stood in front of him. Naturally, he thought it would be a woman. "Yes, I got your message, please sit down," and by the movement of his hand he offered him the empty seat to his left.

The Two Tattooed Woman sitting there gave him the once over. He smiled at her, but the smile was wiped off his face when he heard her voice: "So you're the dude who wants to by the painting, eh?"

It was her strange accent and the way she stared at him after she had spoken to him that made him look away. He had never heard a voice like that before.

Her special talent, according to her, was understanding strangers in a matter of seconds: "Oh, I can size them up just like that," she would say to friends and snap her fingers.

The man who had approached his table took off his shades and rubbed his small dark eyes, then he looked at the Man in the Blue Suit. After this he said, in a smooth foreign accent to him, "I take it you have the painting, *Time Shadow,* here with you sir."

"Yes, I have it here in a safe hold in the South of France," answered the Man in the Blue Suit, in a confident tone.

The Two Tattooed Woman was very loyal to the Man in the Blue Suit, and she got her tuppence worth in right away: "Yea, that's right it's in a safe hold here."

He looked at her and tried to smile, but he could not. He said in a nervous tone: "We would like to buy it." There was a pause, "I will make you an offer you cannot refuse, and we will give you cash for it too."

He was a strange man: for there was no emotion in his voice. Of course, the Man in the Blue Suit understood why: for he was a spy. And he was desperate to get his hands on the file revealing the spy network that was inside the painting inside the little SD card.

The Man in the Blue Suit asked him, as if unconcerned: "Why do you want this painting?"

The reply came right back at him: "I am buying it for a client - a very rich client, here in the south of France."

The Man in the Blue Suit smiled: "I will need to converse with my partner here back at the hotel about that," and he nodded at the Two Tattooed Woman sitting beside him to bring her into the action again.

"Yea that's right, big man." The Two Tattooed Woman was very impressed by this, and she added quickly: "We will have a meeting about it, and we will let you know - OK."

Her thick Glasgow accent made him unsure of how to respond. He could see that divide and rule tactics would not be of any use to him here.

The Man in the Blue suit clapped his hands and brought their meeting to a close: "Right, that's it; I will let you know, sir. Let's meet here again tomorrow, at the same time, and we will give you our decision."

The Two Tattooed Woman smelt a rat too: "Yes we will let you know son - so don't get too excited," and to emphasise the point she wanted to make she stood up and put her hands on her hips.

The Man in the Blue Suit smiled at the man across the table; for he knew he had brought along the right person with him. He knew in his heart that due to the SD card, he had found with the agents names in the back of the painting, he could not sell it to anyone but the real Olga. This was not the representative of the real Olga. He knew that much, and to confirm what he thought he changed the subject and asked him, "So what's Moscow like these days?

The man shrugged his shoulders and, as he lit a full strength Marlborough cigarette, he said mechanically: "Same as it ever was, I guess."

The Man in the Blue suit got up to leave. The Two Tattooed Woman quickly left some Euros on the plastic plate for the waiter. "We will see you tomorrow at the same time" he said to him and he walked away.

The Two Tattooed Woman followed him: "I wiz like that when he said: 'I am buying it for a rich client,' then she snarled. "I tell you Blue Man, I would'nea trust him as far as I could throw him," and as she took his arm she threw in another wondrous comment: "In fact, a would'nea leave him alone with the cat."

They walked round the harbour and looked at all the big boats there, and sometimes they stopped and spoke to tourists, just like themselves, who had come to the principality for the day. It seemed to be the way that everyone joked about what boat they wanted to own when they became rich.

At times, The Two Tattooed Woman hung onto the arm of the Man in the Blue Suit, and then let it go. Sometimes, she would hum her favourite Tina Turner song under her breath.

The Man in the Blue Suit was preoccupied after the meeting and didn't really hear her: for he knew the man to be dangerous. At first, he did not notice her take his arm, and he did not pay too much attention to her, even when she sang to herself again. He could tell that the man he had just met had blood on his hands: for he believed that people who had killed had somehow strangled part of their soul. This made them strange and incomplete. He reckoned they were like this so that they could live with themselves. They were cold and unemotional. People who had committed murder had lost the spontaneity of life; his eyes were lifeless and dangerous.

He knew now that he had not only risked himself, but the Two Tattooed Woman too in coming here. However, he would not give away the people whose names were on the SD card, he had found on the back of the painting. He must try and meet the real Olga and give her the painting, and then get back to the UK safe-

ly. They went for a drink in one of the quite streets not far from the front, and had some cheese and wine there.

After they had finished their wine, the Two Tattooed Woman squawked: "I tell you I don't trust that Russian galoot; he acts like a ghost. I've come across them before, you know. I'd give him a wide berth, Blue Man, if I were you. All he wid give you was mugs money - that creep."

How the Two Tattooed Woman had met other Russian men before he did not know, but it did make him smile. "I think you are right there, you know."

"Yea, he's a weirdo," then she used her favourite expression: 'I wiz like that when he said: 'I will make you an offer you cannot refuse'. Who does he think he is - the governor of the Bank of England?"

At times, it appeared that the Two Tattooed Woman was in total command of the whole world. She knew everything about the world, and all the people in it. She pulled a face as she looked at the Man in the Blue Suit, that indicated pleasure and disgust at the world around her. It pleased her to do this from time to time. She seemed to become centre stage, when she looked down on the world. It was not long after this that she illuminated her own philosophy again: "The world is full of bampots, Blue Man."

7

When they got back to the hotel the Man in the Blue Suit changed into his blue thermal tights. He liked getting out of his blue suit. He kept on his shirt; he wanted to lie down on the bed for half an hour to think about things. The Man in the Blue Suit had a lot on his mind. As he opened his white shirt, he flopped down on the comfortable bed. The Two Tattooed Woman hardly noticed, she was too busy filling the travel kettle with water in the sink in the small adjoining bathroom. She had bought some biscuits from the supermarket nearby the hotel.

"Fancy toilet bag, Blue Man," she laughed. "Didn't know you went in for designer clobber," she said, as she looked at herself in the mirror.

"I don't," was his honest reply, as he lay there on the bed: "I thought it was yours."

"It's a man's bag - that will be right."

Suddenly, the bedroom door flew open and in came Mr Fournier, the hotel owner, followed by his mother, a dark haired hardworking woman who spoke a little English. She had briefly met him before. The woman said out of breath: "We have put you in the wrong room, sir. We should have changed you after break-

fast this morning, there is a man in here now, he must have put his bag in the wardrobe."

His mother started grabbing anything and everything she could see: "We need to get you out before he comes back. You should be in the next room. We need to move all your stuff, before the man comes back."

The Man in the Blue Suit got up and laughed, then he stared at the image of himself in the wardrobe mirror; he thought he looked rather interesting in his white shirt and blue tights. The owner and his mother didn't seem to notice what he was wearing. They just kept running around the room picking up things. Presently, he followed there example and started gathering his clothes together: "To the next room," he said like a Shakespearean actor.

Mr Fournier opened the wardrobe and asked him as he did so: "Did you put anything in here sir?"

Fortunately, they had only opened the travel bag with the food in it: "No, I have still to unpack," said the Man in the Blue Suit, as he stood there in his white shirt and blue thermal pants: "We have been rather busy."

"Good sir, that helps," added Mr Fournier calming down.

The Two Tattooed Woman just stood there in the middle of the room and she stared at the owner and his mother, as they picked up things they wanted to move to the next room. Her mouth was wide open, but she did not say anything. In no time at all, they managed to move everything through to the room next door.

This room also had two single beds in it; it was almost identical with the room next door, except that it had a door you could open that led out onto the back garden. As they settled in, the Man in the Blue Suit had to figure out how to enjoy himself here for the remaining days, hoping that he would make contact soon with the real Olga. He knew they had five more days here in the south of France. So after they had transferred everything to the room next door, he lay on the bed again and relaxed and thought about what they should do next.

That night, they had a nice meal not far from the hotel in an Italian restaurant. Even after one night on the Riviera he could see a slight change in the Two Tattooed Woman. She was starting to relax and she was smiling more.

When the Man in the Blue Suit spoke Italian to the waiter, the Two Tattooed Woman was very impressed, "Where did you learn to speak the lingo, Blue Man? You're a real smoothie."

As he went through the card, he chatted with the waiter, and introduced him to the Two Tattooed Woman. His name was Domenico; he was from the south of Italy. They spoke mainly about Italian cities they knew, and some of the famous football clubs there.

The Two Tattooed Woman starting laughing at the way foreigners behaved in the restaurant. She thought them odd: "Why don't they talk more to each other? They look as if they are still at school, frightened to speak. It's as if they will get arrested if they let their hair down. Why don't they have a few beers and relax."

The Man in the Blue Suit looked at some of the people sitting near him in the restaurant. He could see they were enjoying themselves. He told her, as he picked up his wine glass. "They don't talk as much as we do."

"Come on Blue Man get another bottle of the pink stuff in," and she gently kicked him under the table.

"Rosè you mean?"

"That's the stuff, Blue Man."

A few hours later, they walked down the main street and had a drink in a bar near the front, and then they returned and had another drink in the London Bar, as it was called not far from their hotel.

The Man in the Blue Suit was first into bed again. He heard the Two Tattooed Woman undressing, but he was tired and he soon fell fast asleep. Was it in a dream, or was it real, he could not say? The hotel door slowly opened and a long thin gun with a silencer on it suddenly appeared. The moonlight and the light from the street made the bedroom surreal. It was a man's hand that held the gun; he could tell that much. As the door slowly opened,

the light from the landing made known the figure in the dark suit. He did not recognise him. The man who wore the dark suit looked as if he was from Eastern Europe. It was a strange scene like a cartoon that had yet to be converted into a film.

The man stepped inside. He wore a dark expensive suit that looked cheap on him, his hair was cropped short; he was about twenty years of age, handsome, and eager to explore the dark side of life. He seemed not to know what he was looking for; he kept looking around the room as if someone was missing. The Man in the Blue Suit turned over and tried to shake it off. It was then that he noticed the figure of the Two Tattooed Woman. She was lying crumpled up on the floor between the two beds, half naked, she must have fallen out of bed. He knew that she had too much Rosè wine after the meal. She drank it like Cranberry juice. "Maybe she likes sleeping on the floor," he wondered to himself.

Just at that moment, she coughed and said: "Oh Blue Man, I must have had too much spaghetti," then she burped.

After this he must have fallen asleep again. Then the Man in the Blue Suit was suddenly awakened by a terrified scream. Without doubt it was a real scream - the kind of scream that pulls you into the real world and completely to your senses. He got up right away and opened his door; he noticed that it had been unlocked: "Surely no one would dare come into the bedroom of the Two Tattooed Woman," he joked with himself.

He recognised the figure standing there. It was the mother of the hotel owner Mrs Fournier. She was sobbing. She was standing outside the door of the room next to theirs; the room they had been put into by mistake. The door was opened and the bedside light was on. The Man in the Blue Suit looked inside. The yellow light from the bedside lamp illuminated the tragic scene. There was a man's body in the bed. He had been shot; his pyjamas were soaked in his own blood.

"Oh he's dead monsieur," murmured, Mr Fournier's mother, and she turned and looked up the stairs: "Where is he? Where is John Marie?" she sobbed.

The hotel owner suddenly appeared in his pyjamas and raced by her and into the bedroom. The light seemed brighter now somehow in the room. The Man in the Blue Suit could clearly see the figure of the man covered in his own blood. He had been shot many times in the head and in the body.

As he stood there, the Man in the Blue Suit felt sick; he needed a drink of water. He slowly went back into his room. When he got there, the Two Tattooed Woman was sitting up in bed. She saw how white his face was. She said tentatively to him: "What's wrong with you?" He said nothing. She tried making a joke of it: "I told you should'nae have had that lager in that London bar last night."

Just then, two police officers in uniform came running down the stairs, followed by a man and a woman in plain clothes: "Oh, it's terrible," said the old woman in French, as the first policeman passed her at the bottom of the stair.

The Man in the Blue Suit told the Two Tattooed Woman what he had seen: "There is a man in there dead - shot many times."

As soon as the words left his mouth, she got up out of bed, and cried: "What a murder, in the hotel!"

"I am afraid so."

"What's going on, in here?"

Voices outside there room could be heard, one saying to another: "You must keep calm. We are here now madam. We will deal with it."

Moments later, a policeman, along with a private detective, knocked on the door of the Man in the Blue Suit: "Who is in this room?" the officer asked.

Outside on the landing Mr Fournier answered him: "There are a Scottish couple. They were put into this room by mistake; we then moved them in here just in time, before the man came back in the afternoon."

When the police arrived in their room, the Two Tattooed Woman looked rather anxious. Thankfully, she had dressed by this time. She was standing in the middle of the room staring at them.

Even without her saying a word the policewoman could see she was highly strung, and due this she spoke to her in a gentle tone. "Did you hear, or see anything madam?"

"No, I did not. What happened to the guy next door?"

The Man in the Blue Suit was thankful she did not swear at them. He buttoned his shirt and said: "No, we were both sleeping."

"We better get out of here, it's a mad hoose!" cried the Two Tattooed Woman: "I tell you Blue Man it's a mad hoose."

The Man in the Blue Suit thought about what he had seen: the man pointing the silencer at him. He must have been the assassin. He must have got the wrong information, or did he get the right information, and kill the wrong man? He knew that he did not see the Two Tattooed Woman: for she was lying on the floor.

The man they met this morning may have thought that the woman he was with was a friend of his, living with him in the south of France. He would have told the assassin something about her. Maybe he did not see her when he came into the room.

"Who was the man next door?" the Man in the Blue Suit kept asking himself. "What should I do now? Should I change hotel, or tell the police about the painting with the agents' names in it? "No, I can't do that."

He felt like destroying the painting, but he loved art too much to do that. What about the SD card with all the agents names on it? What should he do with it now? He knew that he could throw away the SD card, with the names and addresses of the agents on it, into the Mediterranean Sea, and that would be the end of that, but he would not do that either.

"Where is the real Olga?" he kept wondering.

Later that morning they left the hotel and headed for Cannes for the day. When they boarded the bus from the same depot as they had for Monaco, the Man in the Blue Suit noticed a strange man get on behind him. He was suntanned, shorthaired, and slimy. He could spot the spy in the crowd now quite quickly.

They had a drink down at the front near the beach, and lo and behold just after they had ordered their drinks who did they

bump into, but the dancing ladies from Paris. The ladies they had met on the train just a day or two ago. “We go dancing today - you come with us?” said Guinevere, who was dressed in a black satin dress.

The Two Tattooed Women liked them even though she could not understand anything they said to her in French. And strangely enough they liked the Two Tattooed Woman. They thought her vivacious and exciting. They could see that she liked dancing too.

When they left the open air cafe the Man in the Blue Suit noticed his shadow across the road. He was leaning up against a wall, not far from the seafront reading a French newspaper, or rather pretending to read it.

The ladies took them in the opposite direction: “To the Cockatoo Club,,” said Guinevere, who pointed the way.

They climbed up to the top of a hill, crossed the road and there opposite a restaurant they entered a large public building. It looked like a school-hall or social club that had been leased to them for the day. “This is where we dance,” she told them.

Inside it really was unbelievable: like something lost in time. There were mainly elderly folk dancing to old French love songs. The dancers all seemed to be lost in a dream, as they waltzed around the dance floor. The Two Tattooed Women kept saying to herself, as the dancers went by her: “It’s wonderful, look how passionate they are.”

For a moment, the Two Tattooed Woman, along with the dancers, became timeless. No one said anything to anyone. She sensed the tradition and passion, lost in space and time, that the mundane world around her could not do anything about now. The Two Tattooed Woman celebrated her youth again by smiling at them, as the dancers passed by her in slow motion. Nothing could disturb this unreal event. The ladies from Paris dressed in elegant hats and dresses at times took to the floor, exchanged partners, and relived their past together. At one point, Guinevere pulled the Man in the Blue Suit onto the floor. “Monsieur come and dance with me,” she said passionately.

This seemed to shake the Two Tattooed Woman back into the present. She pushed him forward towards her. "Go on Blue Man, do your stuff."

It was the French version of the Lonely Hearts Club, all right, where together they could go back in time and celebrate what had been lost, but not forgotten. As soon as the old French songs played, they entered the dream again. The Man in the Blue Suit sensed that even people who were not related to them who were inside the room could enter the dream too: for if you had loved in this life, and had lost love, you could relive it again with others.

The French men and women could see that he was from a different world. He did not want to get the ladies too excited and upset them by shaking his booty, so he danced in the arms of Guinevere, and fitted into the dream as best he could. As they came off the dance floor, she whispered to him: "You must come and see me in Paris monsieur."

Very few women could resist the Man in the Blue Suit. It was great to watch the old dears again and, after about an hour of old-fashioned French dancing, they went for something to eat in a nice French restaurant down near the seafront. He knew that the next day they had to go back to the same cafe bar, and meet the strange man who wanted to buy the painting, *Time Shadow*. He would have to tell him the bad news that the painting was not for sale. He would be quite plain about it: for business after all was business. The art world was no different. "The painting is not for sale, sir," he rehearsed saying to himself.

The Man in the Blue Suit would tell him that he was planning to put the painting into in a European exhibition, that he knew was visiting all the major cities in Europe next year. The exhibition he knew was to kick off in March. Back at the hotel, as he lay on top of his bed, he kept wondering to himself, "But where is the real Olga? "Why does she not make contact with me?"

The next morning another letter inside a white envelope arrived for the Man in the Blue Suit at his hotel. The letter was left at reception, for his attention. No one saw who left it: 'Olga will meet you in London - too dangerous here.'

He knew they would be watching the train station at Nice, in case he made an early escape. No, today he would have to go and see the strange man again. Then they would head back to the UK with the painting, *Time Shadow*, on the day they planned to return, that way the real Olga would not have to change any arrangements, or contact him before they left he Riviera.

The Man in the Blue Suit had booked a night train from Bologna in Italy to Paris; he knew that once they were back in the UK, they would be safe there. He loved Italy, and he wanted to spend a day there.

The cafe bar was quiet when they returned the next day. They sat at the same table outside, opposite the same boats, on the same seats and ordered the same order from the same waiter. And as they sat there, they waited for the same man to come and see them. He arrived on time, and sat down on the same seat. He was dressed in the same suit, and had the same Ray Bans on. The only thing different about him, the Man in the Blue Suit sensed, was that he seemed tired as if he had been up all night. He hadn't shaved either.

"Well, is the Man in the Blue Suit enjoying himself here on the Riviera?" he said in his strange broken English accent to him. Then after a pause he added: "Anything exciting happened to you?"

The Two Tattooed Woman knew how to answer him: "Oh you should go out in Glasgow on a Saturday night if you want real excitement. You are lucky to get home alive," and she stared at him.

This put the wind up him, and he immediately turned to the Man in the Blue Suit and asked him, "Did you bring the painting with you sir?"

"I'm afraid I not at liberty to sell the painting: for I just got word last night that it has to go on a European tour, next year."

The man did not say anything at first. He lit a cigarette. However, as he looked over towards some expensive yachts in the bay, he said in a low tone: "I heard you had some trouble in your hotel the other night?"

The Man in the Blue Suit's eyes narrowed, and he felt that strange strangled spirit inside him again. He did not say anything.

"Oh well, not to worry, as the English say," said the foreign man, who got up and left.

When he was gone the Two Tattooed Woman lifted up her coffee cup, took a mouthful, and then she said in her usual way: "I don't trust that creep."

The Man in the Blue Suit did not trust him either, and he would be on his guard from now till they got back to the UK. He had hid the painting in the false bottom of his tartan bag; thankfully, it was a small painting so it was safe there. As he looked around him he could not help but wonder again how strange the people were who came to live here. It was as if they were all hiding from something, or someone. There were no ordinary people living here. The residents were strange; they were living in an enclosed world. They were like the immigrants he had seen in Glasgow sitting outside cafe bars, with no real connection to the country; the only difference was that the people here were well-dressed, drove expensive cars, and had plenty of money in the bank. Yes, it was strange for even though they had lots of money, they were isolated from kith and kin.

"Well, a few more days, and then we will be back in the UK. We travel by night train from Italy tomorrow evening, then we catch the Eurostar back to the UK."

"Are we going to that poofs place again tonight, next to the hotel?" she asked him.

He knew that the Two Tattooed Woman was referring to the club adjacent to London Bar.

"Can you Salsa?" he asked her, feeling in a better mood now.

"It's a poofs place," is how she answered the question.

"I think we should go out on our last night there and dance the night away - don't you think."

He laughed and as they walked away from the cafe bar back to the centre of Monaco, he said to her with a smile: "And we should also visit the shops here too, and see if we can get you something nice to take back with you."

This shocked the Two Tattooed Woman: "You are no gonnae buy anything here ur you - it's a pure rip-off man."

The Man in the Blue Suit laughed at her honesty. Presently, they went in the direction of the famous casino, and after that they headed back to Nice on the bus.

They were up nice and early for the first train from Nice Ville to Bologna. They walked through the empty streets. It was about a five minute walk to Nice Ville Station, from their hotel. The Man in the Blue Suit, as he carried his tartan bag, through the early morning streets suddenly felt something in the toe of his shoe. When he took it off to see what it was he was surprised to see that a long tack about 2 inches long had gone right through his moccasin shoe. Had someone planted that there so that he would burst a blood artery, or had it just fallen off the back of a truck, or out of someone's pocket? He had not seen it as he walked on, or he would have avoided it. He wondered about this to himself, as he took it out of his shoe. He had been lucky: for it had come in between his toes. Just then, a figure walked round the corner and out of sight. He only caught his dark suit.

The Two Tattooed Woman hardly gave it a thought; she just pulled her pink trolley case along, and puffed on a long duty free cigarette: "Come on, Blue Man, stop messin aboot."

As they got closer to the station some strange dark figures suddenly appeared. They were refugees who had no doubt been there all night in the station area. They came out of the doorways just to look at the Man in the Blue Suit, and the strange creature he was with the Two Tattooed Woman.

The Two Tattooed Woman spotted them right away: "Watch out there's a few bampots over there," she said to him, as she pulled a face to tell him where they were.

The Man in the Blue Suit knew the best thing to do was not to look at them; they must just make their way slowly past the refugees and walk towards the station which he knew was just round the corner.

Thankfully, the first train in the morning was quiet. When they got to Bologna, a few hours later, they spent the day there in

the Red City, visiting the shops and interesting places around the city centre. Italian trains are invariably never on time, and the one they had booked to get them to Paris was no different. They went to the station in plenty of time though. And when it finally did arrive, 30 minutes *in ritardo*, they like everyone else just stood there on the platform and watched the gigantic train glide past them. Even though it was late it was really quite exciting seeing everyone there on the platform together, businessmen, tourists, workers from all different parts of the world, everyone in transit travelling through the night towards their destination. It was fascinating to wonder who they were, and where they were going to, and of course where they had come from.

When the train eventually stopped at the night-time station, the Red City now seemed even more mysterious. The station lights seemed to colour peoples' faces, as they stood there on the dark platform waiting to board the train. Everyone now seemed important in some way. Someone close by said the train had come from Rome. And in amongst these important faces waiting to board the train to Paris was his shadow: the Slouch.

The Man in the Blue Suit did not alert his companion. He just said, as he picked up his tartan bag: "Hopefully, it will be a pleasant journey."

He now knew that he must have turned up in Bologna and followed them around the Red City. The Man in the Blue Suit had not noticed him. When the night train at Bologna Central finally moved off, everyone on it knew that they would be in Paris in the morning. The guard Mario not long after this appeared and told the Man in the Blue Suit that they would be in on their own in their compartment. In broken English, he explained: "The carriages can take six people sleeping, but no one else is in with you tonight."

He smiled after saying this. The Man in the Blue Suit would have been happy with this, but he had booked first class on the Internet, and he told him so. He spoke in Italian to the rail official in a commanding voice. The Man in the Blue Suit was tired and was

so looking forward to a bed for the night. He knew the couchettes were OK, but you could never really get comfortable in them.

The Two Tattooed Woman did not know the difference, and once on board she left her bag inside the compartment, and went in search of the toilet: "To fix my hair," as she put it.

Even though the Man in the Blue Suit was angry, he liked Mario. "You only get a bed sir, if you travel first class," said Mario the Guard, in a defensive tone.

The Man in the Blue Suit stared at him. "Look it says here on the ticket first class; this is a couchette we are in," he countered.

After putting on his little reading glasses, Mario looked at the ticket and for a time he studied the printed paper in his hand. After a moment or two he laughed and said, "Ah, look at the price here. This is a cheap ticket sir!"

The Man in the Blue Suit tried another trick: "I am an author, and I am writing a book; I need to get some sleep now."

Mario was impressed with this, but he could not do anything for him. He said to the Man in the Blue Suit: "It is 200 Euros for a bed for the night on the train, sir."

And to emphasise the point he wanted to make, the guard took a pen out of his inside pocket, and wrote down the amount of the ticket he would have to pay to upgrade to first class: "You see the price, sir," then he informed him: "The first class section is at the other end of the train."

The Man in the Blue Suit's tone was strong and commanding: "You must listen to me Mario; I booked first class. Look it says so here. You must change it right away!"

Mario looked afraid, and he rushed out the compartment: "Be sure and lock your door at night, sir," he said to him, as he hurried away.

"What a strange fellow," said the Man in the Blue Suit, as he watched him go.

Just then, the Two Tattooed Woman came into the compartment. She had gone along to the restaurant car to buy herself a coffee. She could tell by the guard's face when she had passed him

in the corridor that there had been an argument: "I thought you got a sleeper Blue Man," she said rubbing salt into his wounds.

The Man in the Blue Suit shook his head, "No, I'm afraid this is it my dear."

"I told you what these foreigners are like – you didn't believe me."

It all seemed like an endless movie, involving a train journey that would go on forever, just like the film 2046, the Man in the Blue Suit had seen many years ago. He put his bag up on the rack, hung up his blue jacket above him, near the door, then he stretched himself out on the couchette on the left hand side. The Man in the Blue Suit now looked forward to going back to selling paintings for a living. The Two Tattooed Woman sat down and enjoyed her coffee. She too looked out of the window, as the train moved through the night, and she too looked forward to going back to Glasgow, and to her job, cleaning the art salon for the Man in the Blue Suit, and of course going out with her pals to the dancing.

They would return to Glasgow on the London train the following day; he had booked a room in a hotel for them opposite Waterloo station. The Man in the Blue Suit was a seasoned traveller; he knew how to break up a long journey.

8

The Two Tattooed Woman undressed, and pulled her blanket over her and bedded down for the night. There was no one else in the compartment with them on the way back to Paris, so with only two of the six couchettes occupied there was plenty of room for them to put their bags and things where they liked.

The Man in the Blue Suit took off his moccasin shoes and lay with his head at the carriage door; he watched the night landscape fly by outside the train window. He loved doing this. It was so good to be away from all the mundane things at home: arguing about bills, shopping, going to local places, listening to the same arguments, over and over again, in pubs and restaurants, meeting old friends who did nothing but moan, family disputes that never seemed to end. Yes, it was good to be on a night train somewhere between Italy and France, and watch the night produce strange shapes and figures that he could hardly recognise. Even though they were heading home, these images seemed to reinvent themselves and refresh him. He would feel the benefit of the trip no doubt when he got back to Glasgow.

Out of the window in central Europe, suburbs, sleepy towns and desolate areas faded into one long obscure landscape. He imagined humans out there in the night interacting with each oth-

er in ways that were natural and good. The Man in the Blue Suit counted nothing alien to him, either in thought or in action. He knew that all that was happening outside the train at that moment in the world was in his mind. And he laughed to himself and whispered the German word: "*Wunderbar*."

The Man in the Blue Suit was at peace with the world; they were both tired and happy that they were heading home. The international train made its way through the night to Paris at a steady pace.

He must have been sleeping for about an hour when all of a sudden he awoke; he sensed something, or someone, outside in the corridor. As he turned his head round to look behind him, he saw the figure of a man standing there in the middle of the door. On second glance, he could also see there were two others at each side of him. The other thing he noticed was that the man had opened his door and was about to peer inside. The Man in the Blue Suit, as if instructed what to do shut the door in his face. He did this in a manner as if he were chasing away a naughty schoolboy. Now he knew he should have hung his blue jacket with his little personal computer at the other end of the compartment, by the window above his feet. He had been tired, and had not thought about that. It was such a strange sensation, as he watched it move about in front of him; for as he lay there it was as if he was still asleep, yet he knew he was wide awake.

As he lay back in the couchette, he remembered what the guard Mario had said to him. He had told him to bolt the door. He was glad that he had told him to do that; for he had bolted it. And due to this, he knew that the thieves outside in the corridor could not get in. They could only open the door about two inches, just enough to pass a ticket through. If it had been unbolted they would have been able to enter his couchette, go through their pockets and leave without saying a word. He knew that from talking to other travellers, train thieves did not even leave a calling card when they visited you during the night. They slipped in like cats and left accordingly.

The Man in the Blue Suit looked over at the Two Tattooed Woman; he could see she was fast asleep – lucky for them. When he looked back towards the corridor the three men had moved away. He had read about train thieves from reports on the Internet too; it seemed quite a strange life. The thieves booked their tickets, and took their places just like everyone else. They spoke to passengers, and went to bed when it was late. However, their journey was different from others. They lay in their beds and waited for the right moment to go to work.

The Man in the Blue Suit looked at his watch; it was 4:30am. Yes, it seemed the right time for thieves to operate. Most people were asleep now. It was a bit of luck that he had pulled the central blind down over the door too. However, there was still about an inch of space there at the bottom of the blind and, as he stretched his head off his small pillow, he looked under the little curtain to see if he could see anyone out there in the corridor. The atmosphere seemed unreal outside his compartment. He noticed a figure there in the corridor about two doors down. He had silver hair, it was cropped short, and he was unshaven. The man standing there was looking out of the train window unconcerned, as it thundered along through the strange night. "The others must be close by," thought the Man in the Blue Suit.

He could see the man kept looking back towards the compartment opposite him; something was going on in there. The night seemed for a time like day, and day seemed for a time like night. "Maybe there is a halfway point between the two where time gets stranded when such deeds are done, that go unreported."

In any event it got him thinking about how someone could plan such a journey, organise a few mates, and buy some tickets on the Internet with the intention of robbing people. The Man in the Blue Suit knew that he could not go to the toilet at the end of the carriage now: for he would have to unlock the bolted door. He dared not wake the Two Tattooed Woman. She would be up and at them in no time at all: "Right where are they? Let's get into them! Where are the bastards?"

It must have been about half an hour later when he heard some movement again in the corridor; he could hear people running through the train. He heard anxious voices, then laughter, then the noise became louder as the footsteps got nearer to him. Suddenly, three figures flashed by his window. It was like people running away from a gang fight. This was of course the thieves going back to their compartments to climb up into their beds again, and wait for the night train to arrive in Paris in the morning. Their nights' work was now done. While people slept their pockets were emptied, some people were now lying there without the Euros they had brought with them, and no doubt other currencies had changed hands. As the passengers dreamt about their holidays, and other wondrous things they had done, they had been robbed. The night train was quite an experience from Bologna to Paris.

The next time the Man in the Blue Suit awoke he heard voices just along the corridor from where he lay. Outside in the corridor, he could see there was a man in a dark blue jack with Poliza written on the back of it. He was standing where the thief had stood. The train had stopped for some reason, and the cold air drifted in from the little Swiss town, as if to refresh anyone who had wakened up and was now looking out of the window. The sign at the station told them that they were somewhere between Geneva and Bern; they had still a good bit to go. Steady feet moved up and down for a time past the window of the Man in the Blue Suit, then about 15 minutes later the train moved off and headed for Paris again.

As the dawn came up, the Man in the Blue Suit felt safe now. Mercifully, the beautiful morning light extinguished robbers and thieves from his mind, and moreover from doing their rounds. He got up and got dressed. The night guard appeared with the passports for the travellers, and the Man in the Blue Suit greeted him in Italian with a friendly: "Buongiorno, Mario. Come sta?" Then he thanked him, in Italian, for saving him from the midnight thieves. "Molto gentile!"

"You saw them? said Mario in English.

He was also surprised to hear that the Man in the Blue Suit could speak the lingo fluently. He related to him in Italian the events that had happened during the night. They were retold to the guard, as if the Man in the Blue Suit had come across this thing many times before.

Mario listened, then he said in broken English: "Yes, the woman next door to you got a lot of money stolen."

When the guard had gone the Man in the Blue Suit went along to speak to the woman to see if he could help her. As soon as he stepped out of his compartment, he saw that she was coming along the corridor from the washroom. She smiled sadly at him.

The Man in the Blue Suit thought to himself: "I would be fuming if they had stolen my money, but she seems to have that wonderful virtue that comes over a woman when tragedy strikes that a man can hardly fathom, let alone understand."

"I am sorry to hear what happened," said the Man in the Blue Suit," as he popped his head inside her berth.

He noticed another woman similar to her in looks and style in the lower bunk down to his left. It was strange, he thought, that even in bed he could tell that she was middle class. Suddenly, a little girl's face popped up and looked out from the upper berth. Her lovely young face came alive as it came up off the pillow to greet him. She was so excited that she smiled at him, but being precocious she diplomatically tried not to look too happy, due to the tragedy that had just happened. However, the thrill of being on a night train from Rome to Paris where thieves had entered her carriage during the night, and stole money from her guardians was very exciting. He knew that she would always remember this journey.

For something to say, as he stood there, the Man in the Blue Suit openly wondered: "Where do they come from those train thieves?"

"Probably Rome," replied Mario the guard, who was standing behind him waiting to get past.

As he wandered back to his berth the Man in the Blue Suit could not help but remember how natural the thief had acted, as

he stood there looking out of the train window during the night. There was no doubt about it he was the lookout man as the others slipped in. Yes, Mario was right he looked Roman probably from one of the outlying areas, no doubt. Rome was where the train had left from, and where it would return to tomorrow night.

The Two Tattooed Woman was still fast asleep; he thought they were about two hours from Paris now. He looked at her, then he took his toilet bag, and went along to the restaurant car and there he bought himself a morning coffee and brioche. Sitting down inside the small restaurant car, he again wondered about the thieves. He knew they were still on the train. They were no doubt in their couchettes sleeping. The next stop was Paris. It was incredible to think that they would do the same thing on the way back on the night train to Rome. Some unlucky man, or woman, at this moment packing their case would forget to lock their door, and they would slip in like cats again, empty their bags and coat pockets, and then leave without a trace.

They soon arrived back in the UK, and as they came out of Waterloo station at the corner of the street, the Man in the Blue Suit noticed a man in a short grey overcoat on the other site of the street from him. He looked away, but something told him that he understood who he was. The feeling he got from him was that he had read his mail, or had listened in to his telephone calls. He saw him again at the corner of the next street, before the Central Hotel.

"Who is he? Why is he falling the Man in the Blue Suit?" he wondered to himself.

The Two Tattooed Woman did not notice him. He caught sight of him again when she was laughing, talking about a friend who buys expensive clothes, but who lives on a bowl of rice a day. The Two Tattooed Woman had many strange friends in Glasgow.

Their hotel in London was small and indiscreet in comparison to its surroundings; they did have a room though with a view over the city looking east towards St Paul's.

"London out of all the major cities in the world is the most mysterious, don't you think?" he said as they walked towards the reception desk.

"What you on about, Blue Man?"

"At times, it does not seem to be part of the rest of the country; there is a sense when you are here that you are in another country that is until you hear an English voice. Then the polite, sharp, exact tones of the cockney tongue give you some understanding of the philosophy behind the language, don't you think?

"Aye right, you are, Blue Man."

The receptionist, a young black Caribbean woman, welcomed them, then she checked the computer for their names. After tapping the keyboard, she flashed her eyes between then as she asked: "Would you like a double room, with a double bed or two singles?" and she looked away, as she waited for the answer.

"No, no, it's fine, thanks, two single beds, lovely."

The vision of the Two Tattooed Woman rolling onto him during the night made him sweat again. "Come on, Blue Man…"

It was a nice hotel, the kind of place you expect to meet an interesting stage performer, or travelling executive. The Man in the Blue Suit had stayed there many years ago.

The Man in the Blue Suit was happy. He whistled his favourite Italian love song as he went to the room, had a shower and then he got changed. Half an hour later another letter from Olga was handed into the hotel for him: *Head for the Garden Restaurant in Soho. I will meet you there at 7 pm*.

At about half past six, he popped out to buy a packet of cigarettes. He found a small convenience store just round the corner form his hotel in Waterloo. It was a typical store that sold everything from videos to Valpolicella. When he came out of the shop, he noticed his friend in the short grey raincoat across the road. He was staring into the shop window looking back at the people across the road from the hotel. When he spotted the Man in the Blue Suit, he brought out his mobile phone.

The Man in the Blue Suit turned right at the corner, and then he went for a coffee inside a small café, next to the hotel.

About ten minutes later, he headed back to the hotel. Inside the hotel, he looked at the letter again. The note was inside a white envelope, and had been left at reception for him. He said to himself in a sardonic tone: "So, I have to meet her in a restaurant in Soho this time."

He put the letter in his pocket and waited at the reception: for he had arranged to meet the Two Tattooed Woman there. When she finally came down from their room they made their way along to the tube station. When he told her where they were going she was quite pleased: "Oh, we are going for a Chinese in Soho - that sounds good."

Once in Soho, they wandered in search of the restaurant, "It always amazes me," said the Man in the Blue Suit, to himself,, "how a woman can walk through a sex centre, and hardly be affected by it; they seem to take it for granted."

The Two Tattooed Woman must have been thinking about the meal; for she never said anything to him, as they walked through the seedy area. When they arrived at the Chinese restaurant the Man in the Blue Suit noticed that his friend was there. The man in the short grey overcoat, who had been watching him was there in the restaurant; this time he was at the bar. However, he got a good look at him. He was small, bald, short, and he noticed too that he had put on small round glasses to read the evening paper at the bar.

A nice looking young Chinese woman approached them with a tray of drinks in her hand and said: "Olga is over there," and she pointed the way for them to go.

"Yes, that's right," said the Man in the Blue Suit, quickly. "Olga is over there," and went forward to meet her.

Just then a middle-aged woman, with a tired smile, about his age, stood up and beckoned him to come over to her table. "Please sit down," she said when they got near.

To his surprise, the man in the short grey overcoat also approached her table, and asked if he could join them. As if rehearsed, the woman in a smart black sequenced dress nodded, then introduced herself, "Hi I'm Olga," she said, as she put out

her hand. "And this is my partner David. I believe you are here in London, with your friend, to sell the painting *Time Shadow*." she added with a smile.

The Man in the Blue Suit smiled back at her, and declared: "Well every painting has its price, I guess."

"Oh, I nearly forgot, this is David," she said, as if just noticing him beside her.

The Man in the Blue Suit did not say that he had seen him before. Even though he was short sighted, it was plain to see that David pretended not to see the Two Tattooed Woman standing there right in front of him. She was now staring at him. However, when she said: "How you doing, mate?" all of a sudden, as if someone had told him who she was, he looked at her, nodded and put out his hand.

"Aye, good to meet you," added the Two Tattooed Woman."

The strange woman said: "I'm Olga." She was now sitting at the table looking up at the Two Tattooed Woman. "You like Chinese food?"

"Love it," replied the Two Tattooed Woman.

The Man in the Blue Suit nearly laughed when he heard her say this. He wanted to hear the man's voice again so, before he sat down, he asked him: "How is business in the city, David?"

"Very good thanks; I am working in the oil industry," said David right away in a quiet voice: "It funds my love of paintings, you see."

David nodded towards Olga, as he got himself comfortable in his chair beside her. His eyes troubled the Man in the Blue Suit: for he could see that he had the eyes of a hypnotist. The man according to that strange profession spoke slowly, as if he was trying to interrupt the gentle flow of life around him.

The Man in the Blue Suit got the feeling that they were up to no good, and that he wanted to control his mind. He smiled at the woman, but he knew that this was not the real Olga, and that they were after the painting so that they could access the agents' names in the back of it.

The Man in the Blue Suit smiled to himself and, to emphasise the point he wanted to make, he made funny gestures with his hands, the way they do in slap stick movies: "You know you have the eyes of a hypnotist, my friend," he said to him and laughed.

The Two Tattooed Woman was the first to agree with him, as she poured herself a glass of water from the large jug on the table, she whispered under her breath, "Aye your right there, Blue Man."

Thankfully, this was not picked up so the conversation flowed as natural, as it could under the circumstances. The Man in the Blue Suit kept his guard up; for he was aware that the man sitting across the table from him had an ulterior motive in his mind. It was at this point that the Man in the Blue Suit suddenly realised that there was more to Olga than he had first imagined. She was trying to seduce the Two Tattooed Woman. She was doing this by smiling at her, and sometimes the slow movement of her hand touching hers. Of course, this went over the head of the Two Tattooed Woman, who at all times was as natural as she could be. She had no interest in women for sex.

Olga suggested the fish. However, David did not want to eat; he said that he would just have a soft drink. The Man in the Blue Suit laughed when he heard him say this. "Yes, alcohol can interfere with the mind," he added, keeping up the joke.

He noticed that the woman pertaining to be Olga laughed at this remark, but not her accomplice David; he kept his thoughts to himself, portraying the image of the evil genius.

The Man in the Blue Suit knew that they were up to no good; he would play along until he knew what the game was all about. Why did they want to buy the painting *Time Shadow* from him? This was not the real Olga that Twiggy had written to him about, telling him to give the painting to.

He waited for the right moment to ask her the question that had been sent to him. It was not long in coming. Olga said that she had travelled the world, but was fed up living in hotel rooms now. So after he had been served with the fish, he coughed and said: "So what's Moscow like these days?"

There was a pause, but the correct answer to that questioned that would reveal the real Olga, never came from her lips. "Oh it's the same as it ever was, full of rich and poor people."

"What does the Man in the Blue Suit say to an offer of 10K for the painting, *Time Shadow*? said David as he peered into his eyes.

The Two Tattooed Woman screamed: "Ye aff yer heid!"

In the madness of it all, the Two Tattooed Woman could see that there was something not quite right with the people sitting opposite her in the Chinese restaurant in Soho, and she stared at them. The Man in the Blue Suit laughed. He would most certainly be interested in the offer if they had replied to the question in the right manner, but so far they had not.

How strange London was in comparison to the south of France, spies along the Riviera there could watch nude bodies on the beach, and beautiful woman walking along the front, as they worked. However, here in the city of London, beauty was something strange to its inhabitants, it was on show everywhere of that there was no doubt, but it was treated with brutal nonchalance."

As if reading his thoughts, David asked him: "Did you like Nice?"

The Man in the Blue Suit had never mentioned to him that he had been there, so here was an obvious connection: a link with someone he knew there: "They must be working together for the Russian man, Mr Gromyko, he reckoned.

Playing the game, he smiled again and said to him: "Oh, the Riviera is like my second home. You know what it is like: beautiful weather, beautiful women, what more can a man ask for."

The Man in the Blue Suit thought to himself: "The thing that hits you when you are in bad company is that all the faces around you seem to be closer to them than to you. You can never find an honest face to hold on to, someone in the crowd, an individual in society, you want to confide in. I am afraid, honest faces all seem to be somewhere else at that moment."

"Listen I have a flat just round the corner in Dean Street where we can go to after this," said David in a monotone voice.

At this point, his eyes were fixed on the mystic realm of entrapment, and he stared at the Two Tattooed Woman. "Yes, we can chat there," said the woman who went by the name of Olga.

The stare of the Two Tattooed Woman was more outrageous though than his; for she had that mad look in her eyes, and it took him by surprise. He quickly looked away from her. It was a brave man indeed who would attempt to put the Two Tattooed Woman under his spell.

"You know you are right, Blue Man, that guy's got weird eyes," she whispered to him again.

The Man in the Blue Suit thought he would play along for a while, even though he knew that David was trying to put him under. He knew that he would not have any luck with the Two Tattooed Woman. The Man in the Blue Suit looked at the dark brown eyes of a woman at the next table, and the feeling inside him that they were in the same room seemed to reassure the Man in the Blue Suit that the man across the table from him could do nothing to harm them. However, that was a mistake, he felt himself drifting from the table. He had learned from a hypnotist friend that the best way to avoid going under was to collect all the images of all the things you have in front of you, and not let go of them.

He looked around him. The table he could see was covered with a white cloth embroidered with red thread. It had a lovely looping pattern near the corners of it. His Timex watch face was familiar to him; it read seven thirty-five. He felt so please with it when he looked at the second hand going round; he remembered the day he bought it. The traditional sauce bottle on the table was half empty. The hands of the woman sitting at the table next to him were beautiful and thin. The man she was with was wearing a check shirt, and his glasses had thick lenses in them. The five women were celebrating someone's birthday; he noticed that not one of the women wore a wedding ring. He examined the colours of the man's grey tweed jacket sitting there too, and the white shirt of the man in from of him at the bar. Then he listened to the chatter from a nearby table about what type of food they liked: "Oh, I

am going to order the lobster," said a woman in a very posh voice."

Thankfully, these thoughts kept the Man in the Blue Suit from going under, and into the void and control of the hypnotist who sat opposite him in the Chinese restaurant in Soho.

The Man in the Blue Suit played his part well; he pretended to be not himself. He reckoned that if he were under his power, he would follow his will and end up selling the painting to him for a few bob more than a song. He eat his meal hardly saying anything only now and again, "Yes," or No," to this or that question.

After coffee, David paid the bill and they went towards the tube station; this time to Piccadilly, on the blue line. It was raining now and this upset the Two Tattooed Woman. Not long after they came out of the restaurant, she squawked: "It's is pure depressing this weather. I'm heading back to the hotel. You are on your own, Blue Man, see ya," and she hurried off.

The Man in the Blue Suit suddenly felt vulnerable. He looked at her as she passed him, as if to tell her to stay, but before he could say anything she was gone in a flash, over the walkway to catch the tube on the other side of the street; he knew the train would take her back to Waterloo station.

After her slim figure had disappeared down into the tube station, he knew he was now alone with David and Olga. As they walked along back through the dark Soho streets, the Man in the Blue Suit did the same thing as before; he focused on people and places and avoided the eyes and the voice of the hypnotist beside him, when he spoke to him. He looked up at the flat just then above the sex shop, and he saw a naked figure dancing behind a dark curtain. The figure was no doubt an advert for clients down below.

A lovely Arabic young lady in the full bloom of youth walked towards him; she gave the impression that even the fading light around her could not diminish her beauty. She made quite an impression, as she came towards him in her plastic short Mac and black tights. He stared at her until she approached him. The Man in the Blue Suit joked to himself when he realised he was staring

at her. "Will you ever again feature in my subconscious, or will you be lost forever, never to be recalled again."

The Arabic young lady must have heard him: for she smiled at the Man in the Blue Suit, before she walked by him. And he being a gentleman whispered to himself: "I hope, I will remember you."

They passed a night club; the door was open and the strange long face of a man at the bar there told the Man in the Blue Suit that he was not enjoying the experience. However, the happy dance beat reminded him of the south of France, even though the man standing there was out of sync with his surroundings.

Just by the clothes shop another pretty young woman, this time in a dark coat and tartan scarf, spoke to someone on the phone. As she stood at the kerb swaying her hips she said to whoever it was that she was calling: "You have got to watch people these days, you know, what you see is invariably not what you get…"

The Man in the Blue Suit could see that his thoughts were not being picked up by the hypnotist, and he smiled to himself: "You are quite right there, my dear."

It was raining quite heavy now, so they all hurried on. The strange flat entrance just round the corner was not what the Man in the Blue Suit had imagined to be a typical London close. It looked more like the entrance to a tenement in Glasgow. There were very few signs about as to what type of people lived here. David was obviously one of them. He never spoke to Olga as they made their way up the dank stairway. The Man in the Blue Suit continued to give the impression of being halfway between where he wanted him to be, and where his natural self was supposed to be. When the light was switched on he could see he was now standing in a large flat full of antiques. Just as they entered the main front room the landline phone rang beside a leather settee. David immediately grabbed the phone and fell onto the leather chair beside it.

"Hello!" there was a long pause, before he added, "OK, that sounds great. We will discuss it when we meet, next week?" Then

he stretched out his short legs and crossed them, and for a moment he seemed to forget all about the Man in the Blue Suit and Olga standing there in front of him, "Yes, I know that restaurant…"

Olga threw off her short coat and said "Well, I guess I will make the tea," and she walked away towards the kitchen at the end of the living room.

The Man in the Blue Suit could hear David's voice speaking on the telephone, as he followed her. The strange thing was that David was now in a normal state again. The hypnotist was a real person. He had friends and business connections. He had a job. He had contacts. This was strange for him to cope with: "I guess there must be a cut-off point when he switches back to the weird and wonderful world of the hypnotist."

The Man in the Blue suit wandered into the kitchen. He was pretending to be tipsy, as well as under the spell of David the hypnotist. And as many people do who frequent the capital, he whistled a tune about it. Just after he stopped whistling, he noticed Olga putting something in his drink. She obviously wanted to help him along to where the hypnotist wanted him to go to. The Man in the Blue Suit looked away from her, and he stared at the dishes in the sink; there were many dishes there. He was relaxed now quite happy directing himself to and from the world around him, like a character in a mystery film.

"There you go, that will pick you up." she said handing him a hot mug of tea. "David won't be long, and we can get down to business," she said, as she put both hands round her cup.

He nodded and looked towards the hall. The paintings on the wall there were dreadful, abstract and dark, and the ones in the living room he remembered were not much better. When David came off the phone he shouted through to Olga "We have to be there tomorrow night at 9 pm - is that all right darling?"

"Yes, fine," she replied.

Olga walked back into the living room, so he turned and he followed her. In the living room, the Man in the Blue Suit moved towards the window, and there he looked down onto the Soho Street below him. Not long after this he was asked directly by

David, who was still sitting on the leather chair by the settee: "Can we do a deal now for the painting *Time Shadow*?" There was a pause, then he made him an official offer: "We thought around £2000 didn't we Olga?" he said leaning back in his chair staring at him.

He was not going to sell it to them no matter the price, but he was going to let them down gently. The Man in the Blue Suit turned round and said: "Well, I will need to consult my partner back at the hotel about that."

He smiled over at Olga, when he thought about the Two Tattooed Woman in bed, sleeping away quite the thing. He wondered if she would waken up and look for him.

David was not in a hurry, and he changed the subject "How long have you been in the art business, sir?"

"Longer than I can remember," said the Man in the Blue Suit.

"I have a store here in West Brompton, London, you know," added David, "where my friends store my paintings. I will need to get an agreement from my partners, before we can send you a cheque - but if we agree it should be no problem."

He had not taken a sip of the laced tea yet; he held it close to his mouth in pretence, as he looked at him. David did not know what Olga had done, but the Man in the Blue Suit noticed that she flashed her eyes at him several times, as if trying to tell him something. How could he get out of this, for he did not want the painting *Time Shadow* to be transported with its list of agents back to Moscow? He didn't want to go under, and tell them about where it was in his tartan bag at the hotel.

The Man in the Blue Suit quickly made an excuse: "I have just remembered, I need to get back to the hotel to meet someone from the British Council." This he knew always impressed people, "Sorry I haven't time for the tea," and he placed the mug gently down on the small glass table in front of David. And as he walked out of the flat, he said in an upbeat friendly tone: "Yes, contact me at the hotel, and I will let you know about the painting *Time Shadow*."

David looked at Olga, and Olga made a gesture with her hand as if life was something you just had to put up with. With a smile on his face, the Man in the Blue Suit left the strange apartment in Soho, and he walked down on to the street, and caught the tube to Waterloo that he knew would take him back to his hotel.

When he got to his hotel, opposite Waterloo train station, there was a very attractive woman waiting there. He could see by her dress that she was an air stewardess. The Man in the Blue Suit did not know the airline, but the suit she was wearing was very smart indeed. In fact, she looked like a model. It was as if she was just about to do a photo shoot, or video promo.

He wondered how Katie was getting on. He could see it was eleven thirty on the clock behind the empty desk in the hotel. He naturally walked up to the reception desk to pick up his key, until he remembered that the Two Tattooed Woman must have it in the room with her. He stopped and stared at the key with the number 27 on it, lying on the counter that someone had left there: "She will no doubt be asleep by now," he said to himself, as he turned away from the reception desk.

He naturally wondered what to do. The elegant woman got up and walked over to him. She put out her hand and radiated a lovely smile. My name is Olga; I hear you have an interesting painting you wish to sell."

"It seems the Man in the Blue Suit is well known in London," he replied, as he shook her hand.

"Would you like to go to my room and talk about it?" she asked him in broken English.

9

Olga was a very attractive girl with cropped mousy brown hair, and a slender body. She talked in a confident manner, and she walked accordingly.

"What's your room number?" he asked her.

"38." she said with a gorgeous smile, "the one next to yours."

Even on the landing the Man in the Blue Suit did not want to waken the Two Tattooed Woman, so when they got near to his room on the second floor, he spoke in a soft low tone to the woman beside him: "So you are the real Olga, yea. You know you are the second one I have met today."

When they sat together on the bed in her room they started talking about paintings, and the Man in the Blue Suit touched the side of her face, but he got the impression that she was under some kind of authority from another lover so he withdrew, and made a joke of it: "They say don't rest if you want to conquer."

"I have got a girlfriend," she replied in a soft voice.

"Oh," laughed the Man in the Blue Suit.

Although, she worked for an eastern airline, he could tell she was French. They talked for a time, and she told him that she was part of a strange group who wanted to buy paintings and sell them on the Internet. But who was this attractive lady? Was she just an-

other foreign agent trying to get the list of agents names inside the painting *Time Shadow*, or was she just someone who liked to meet men in hotels at night for lovemaking.

They talked and talked, and she told him many tales about the artists she had met on her travels. He thought he had better try and get some sleep, for it was getting late.

"Can I sleep here tonight: for I am locked out of my room?" he asked her, as he loosened his tie.

Olga smiled back, and said in her very sexy foreign voice: "Of course."

"Thank you."

"Although please note, I am up early in the morning."

It was at the point when she was undressing that the Man in the Blue Suit asked her: "Have you been to Moscow?"

"Yes."

"What's it like?"

"Oh, you can buy an elephant there if you want too."

The Man in the Blue Suit fell onto the bed behind him, "Well, thank goodness for that."

He would give her the painting in the morning; he would get up early and ask the maid for the key to his room, so as to not waken the Two Tattooed Woman.

"I will send you the money in the post," said Olga getting into bed beside him.

"You should deliver it personally," he said as he kissed her.

He woke early for he heard the maid outside on the landing. She was opening up the restaurant area opposite his room. He got up right away, put on his blue boxer shorts, and went to see her.

"I have locked myself out, madam, can you let me in?

She had just unlocked the dining room door, and was just about to go inside and switch on the lights. The worker turned round and stared at him. She was quite impressed - who could forget the Man in the Blue Suit, even in his boxer shorts. She was from Eastern Europe, a quiet soul, young and sad looking. However, the sight of the man, not in his Blue Suit first thing in the

morning, made her smile: "Oh, I have the key here, sir" she said lifting it out of her apron pocket.

The key was on a string, and the sight of it made the Man in the Blue Suit very happy indeed. He bent forward and kissed her on her forehead: "You are my friend for life, my dear."

The Man in the Blue Suit was finally going to get rid of the painting, *Time Shadow*, with all the agents' names inside it. He took the key from her, and as soon as he got into his room he went into his tartan bag, and took the painting out of it. He went straight back into Olga's room with it in his hand. He had left her door slightly ajar. The Man in the Blue Suit kissed Olga gently on the side of her face, this time to waken her. And as her green opal eyes opened, he whispered to her: "*Time Shadow*," and kissed her again, "Don't forget to come and see me."

He went back to bed before the Two Tattooed Woman woke up; it was just before six o'clock. He could see the time on his little travel alarm clock beside his bed. He wanted to get a couple of hours more sleep before they made their way back to Glasgow on the train.

The Man in the Blue Suit must have been sleeping for about an hour when the phone on the wall rang. He thought it might be Olga calling him from next door to thank him. However, he recognised the voice; it was the Indian man who worked at reception. He must have been on the nightshift. He had noticed him on the way out when they were heading to Soho.

"Two women are downstairs to see you sir," he said in a heavy Indian English voice.

"Put them on then," the Man in the Blue suit said playing the game.

"They want you to come down to reception," said the Indian man.

"If they want to meet me put them on the phone," he repeated.

"You have to come down sir, and see them."

There was something not right, and he sensed this; he knew he had locked his hotel door, and they were quite safe in their

room. Surely no one was daft enough, or brave enough, to rouse the Two Tattooed Women at this time in the morning.

The phone went dead so he hung it up onto the wall and once more pulled the thin white blanket up under his chin. The Man in the Blue Suit looked over at the Two Tattooed Woman; she was fast asleep. It must have been about half an hour later the phone rang again.

"You come down sir, the two girls are here for you," said the same voice as before.

He gave the same answer. Then he said in a gruff voice: "I'm in bed," and he put the phone down.

The Man in the Blue Suit could not help but imagine the strange players who involve themselves in schemes, stretching across Europe. The Mafia, and less well-known organized associations, monitoring people before robbing or killing them.

The Man in the Blue Suit had got rid of the painting to another source, and now he must move on. He knew that no one was on the front door of the hotel, when he came back from Soho, so no one had seen him meeting the young air stewardess: the real Olga.

In the morning, they went downstairs for breakfast. The Indian man's shift had ended, and he was long gone. He looked at the clock on the wall inside the restaurant; it was only 8 o'clock. The foreign workers were around in the foyer, some of them were just starting while others were just about to head home. It was another day in the life of a busy hotel in London, for those who worked and lived there. A young receptionist at that moment, he had not seen before, came into the restaurant, and she smiled at the Man in the Blue Suit, thereafter she handed him a white envelope. "A letter for you, sir."

He opened it: *Have a lovely day, Olga*.

When they got back to their room there was another phone call for the Man in the Blue Suit. It was from the other Olga: "Can we meet at the British Library today?"

"What time," he asked, not knowing if they should go or not. Then he added: "Is one o'clock OK?"

"That's fine."

The British Library he knew was not far from Euston Station. In fact, it lay right between St Pancras Kings Cross and Euston Station. The latter was where they would catch their train. He would keep things tidy, and go and see them before getting the train back to Scotland at 2pm.

The Man in the Blue Suit, and the Two Tattooed Woman got there about 12:45. They wandered into an exhibition about the history of television on the ground floor. He knew they had to meet them in the restaurant area upstairs, so at the appointed time they made their way up to the dining area. There were quite a few people there having lunch at this time of the day, many of them worked on their laptops while eating, but the majority sat talking to each other. They were not the normal types you found inside a library. The people who came here may have been from all walks of life, but they were academic. The People at the British Library, he reckoned were in the main professional people: publishers, editors, producers, researchers, secretaries, and of course students.

The Man in the Blue Suit having been there before knew where the public restaurant was situated. He indicated the way for them to go when they got out the escalator. Inside he ordered two cups of tea. He would have liked to have bought a couple of scones too, but they were double the price of what you paid for them on the street. The Man in the Blue Suit disliked profiteers. The Two Tattooed Woman in any case was not hungry.

"Is this a library?" she squawked, as she stood beside him in the queue.

They took a table right in the middle of the restaurant. Not long after they had sat down in walked David and Olga, hand in hand. The look on both their faces told of relentless encounters with one another, and even more to come. They were like business partners who just had to get on with each other, and in between that live their own lives.

David the hypnotist said in an unusual happy tone, as he approached his table. "And how is the Man in the Blue Suit, today?"

In fact, it was such a friendly tone that it took him completely by surprise. However, he soon retreated into the hypnotist guise again, and when nothing followed he stared at The Man in the Blue Suit. His eyes once more told no immediate story, it was plain to see that he wanted the Man in the Blue Suit to inhabit the present moment with him and forget everything else, so that he could get him to sell the painting, *Time Shadow*. He could see that the hypnotist was someone who never gave up on his subject.

Olga smiled at the Two Tattooed Woman, and before she sat down beside her, she put her face forward for a kiss from the Man in the Blue Suit, which he duly obliged.

The Two Tattooed Woman laughed to herself, then she said "Are you gonna tell them Blue Man, or will I do it?"

He thought he had better tell them the bad news right away: "I am afraid I have sold the painting, *Time Shadow*, to a buyer for an undisclosed fee."

There was a silence, and no one said anything, so he added: "We will be travelling back to Scotland later today; I am pleased that the painting has found a good home."

Nothing much was said after this; light chitchat followed about the British Library, the people in it, and how extensive their collection was.

When they were gone the Two Tattooed Woman turned round and said to him: "Aye you're quite right, Blue Man, no selling it to them - those two are weird."

The Man in the Blue Suit knew that it had been quite a trip. They had enjoyed themselves. He could see that she was happy.

"Well, we had better get back up the road," he said, and he bent forward and kissed the Two Tattooed Woman.

Presently, they walked along to Euston Station and caught the 2.15 pm train back to Glasgow.

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